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SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS of SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

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MYLAPORE, MADRAS

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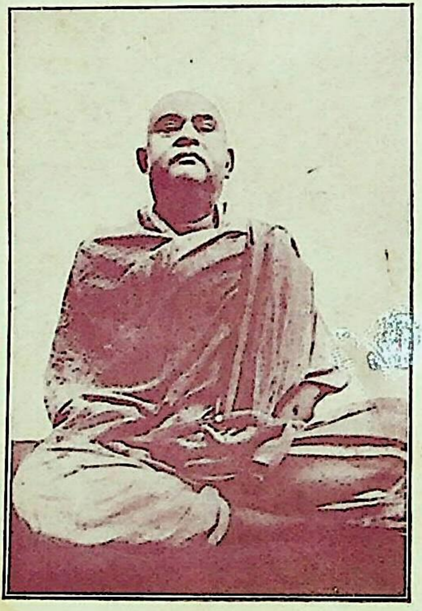

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

THE
ETERNAL COMPANION

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

BY

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MYLAPORE, MADRAS—4
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PREFACE

In writing the biographical part of this book, I have used much of the material contained in the Bengali Life of Swami Brahmananda, published by the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta, India. To this I have added the personal reminiscences of Swamis Yatiswarananda, Akhilananda, Vishwananda and myself. The manuscript has been shown to nearly all the Swamis of our Order now living in the United States who knew Swami Brahmananda intimately. Most of these are his disciples. I am grateful to them for their suggestions and comments. Owing to the present war situation, it was unfortunately not possible to collect additional material from his disciples in India.

The teachings have been translated from the original Bengali edition, also published by the Udbodhan Office. They are taken from diaries and private records of informal talks given to the monastic disciples on various occasions.

PRABHAVANANDA.

Hollywood, March 1944.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This volume takes the place of *Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* published by us fifteen years ago and now out of stock. Since that book came out, two excellent volumes were published in Bengali, one on the biography of Swami Brahmananda and the other presenting a collection of his teachings.

The book entitled *The Eternal Companion, Brahmananda—His Life and Teachings* was prepared out of these two volumes supplemented by the first-hand knowledge of Swami Prabhavananda. It was first published by the author from the Vedanta Society of South California in March 1944. The biographical section presents to the public interesting facts about the life of the Spiritual Son of Sri Ramakrishna hitherto not available in English. The teachings section subsumes all the valuable matter contained in our older book, now presented in an exquisitely lucid and concise manner.

We are very grateful to the Swami for granting us permission to re-publish his entire book in

India with a slight alteration in the subtitle suggesting the substantial correspondence between our old publication and the present book so far as the teachings portion is concerned. We hope the book will in its present form command a wider use among spiritual seekers, who will also find by experience the new title sufficiently justified.

PUBLISHERS.

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INTRODUCTION

TO write the biography of an illumined soul is very difficult, if not impossible. For his is preeminently an inner life. True, he may engage in certain external activities; he may achieve the kind of success which impresses the outer world. But all these activities and achievements—including, even, his spoken and written teachings—will fall far short of, and fail to express the real man.

An ordinary professor or scholar teaches out of his accumulated learning. Such a man's scholarship is far greater than the man himself. That is to say, he may teach the loftiest truths, theoretically, without having made them a part of his own life and experience. A man of spiritual wisdom also teaches these truths, not theoretically, but out of his own experience. Nevertheless, the expression of these truths in words cannot possibly correspond to the vastness of his inner knowledge, which is inexpressible because it is transcendental. We know a man with our mind and senses; but our mind and senses cannot reveal to us the nature of an illumined soul. In order to be able fully to understand such a soul, a man must himself be illumined.

When you go into the presence of one of these great beings, something very wonderful happens. Their mere presence gives you, as it were, a supersense which enables you to recognize the greatness which is in them. Maharaj (as Swami Brahmananda was called) used to give us that supersense whenever we were with him. Our minds were lifted up and caught glimpses of his inner nature. But this glimpse was only partial. We were aware that the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who were themselves illumined souls, could see more in Maharaj than we, his disciples, ever saw. Swami Ramakrishnananda, founder and head of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Madras, once introduced Maharaj to the devotees there, saying: "None of you have seen Sri Ramakrishna himself, but now you see Maharaj, and that is the same thing." On another occasion a devotee brought a fruit which he wanted to offer to Sri Ramakrishna in the shrine. Swami Ramakrishnananda told him to offer it to Maharaj and said: "To offer this fruit to Maharaj is as good as offering it to Sri Ramakrishna."

One day I hesitated to accept something that Maharaj told me. Swami Shivananda was also present at the time, and he agreed with Maharaj immediately. I did not like this. Later I talked to Swami Shivananda alone and more or less accused him of being a 'yes-man' to Maharaj. Swami Shivananda laughed and said: "My boy, you see in Maharaj only Maharaj. But we see the external form of Maharaj with nothing inside it but God. Whatever Maharaj tells you comes directly from God."

Remember that this statement was not made by a mere ignorant enthusiast, but by one who was himself an illumined soul. Its truth was not clear to me at the time, but later I began to understand and believe it, because of a talk which I had with Maharaj himself. One day, he asked me to look at the almanac and find an auspicious date for his departure from Madras. I did as I was told, but I could not help smiling. Maharaj noticed this and asked me why I was amused. I replied: "Well, Maharaj, you always go through this routine of finding an auspicious date for your departure. But invariably you suddenly make up your mind to leave on some other day."

At this Maharaj said: "Do you think I do anything according to my own will? The devotees insist upon fixing some date for my going. To avoid constant pestering I fix a tentative date. But I don't move or do anything until I know the will of the Lord."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that you are always guided by the will of God?"

Maharaj: "Yes."

Myself: "I may think or feel that I am doing the will of God, when in fact I am only following my own inclinations and attributing them to God's will. Isn't it the same with you?"

Maharaj: "No my child, it is not the same."

Myself: "Then do you mean to say that you actually see God and talk to Him directly and know His will?"

Maharaj: "Yes, I wait until I know His will directly and He tells me what I should do."

Myself: "For everything you do?"

Maharaj: "Yes, for everything I do, I have the direct guidance of God."

Myself: "And do you accept only those disciples He wants you to accept?"

Maharaj: "Yes."

After this talk with him I began to find some meaning in his peculiar way of acting. For example, whenever any of us would ask his advice he would say: "Wait. My brain is not working today," or: "My stomach is upset. I'll answer tomorrow." Sometimes many tomorrows would pass before the disciple got any definite answer. But when Maharaj did finally speak there was always a special power behind his words.

"How does he know the will of God? Does he go into samadhi every time before he knows it?" This was the thought that continually crossed my mind. But I dared not ask him, and waited, hoping somehow to get an answer. Then, one day, I was discussing with another disciple the spiritual visions of 'Gopal's Mother', a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. She got this name because she used to see Gopal, the boy Krishna, playing with her, walking beside her and calling her mother. Many other visions of hers are recorded by Swami Saradananda in his life of Sri Ramakrishna. I expressed my opinion that these visions of 'Gopal's Mother' belonged to the transcendental plane. I did not believe that she had actually seen Sri Krishna with her bodily eyes. Maharaj, who was sitting in his room, overheard me. He came out and said rather sarcastically: "Ah! So you are omniscient?"

"But Maharaj," I asked "how can one see God in the external world, with bodily eyes?"

Maharaj replied that a man who has attained samadhi and reached the transcendental plane, receives divine sight. Then he can see God with closed eyes in the superconsciousness of samadhi, and also with open eyes while fully conscious of the external world. He added that to an enlightened man there is no longer any line of division between matter and spirit: "What you see as matter is really Brahman."

In the Upanishads we read that "a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman". What is it that attracts people to a God-man? Young or old, boys or girls, men, women or children, saints or sinners—all felt an indefinable attraction to Maharaj, even if they did not in the least understand what is meant by "a knower of Brahman".

When I first met him I was a boy of eighteen. I did not know anything about God or God-realization. I was immediately drawn to him as if to a long-lost friend who was very near and dear to me. I had never felt such a love before in my life: it was the love of parents and the love of a friend, all in one. Everybody had the same experience. Once I asked Swami Ṣubodhananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the reason for this all-satisfying love which came forth from Maharaj. Swami replied: "God is love. Maharaj has realized God. Now he is full of love."

You did not have to be pure-hearted or spiritually-minded to love Maharaj. The most depraved natures felt this love when they came into his presence, and it transformed many of them into saints. Maharaj did not talk to everybody about God or spiritual matters or philosophical truths; he would come down, as it were, to the level of each individual. He became that person. Maharaj could uplift a man without his even knowing it; and when the other left his presence, he was bathed in love and purity. When you were with Maharaj you forgot yourself. It was like being in another world where there was no worry or grief, and where man was not man but divine. You were filled with a peculiar joy which you could not explain or understand.

In his physical appearance, Maharaj had a stately, regal bearing. He was tall and plump but not fat. His face had a serene, joyful expression. His eyes were deep, and always seemed to us to be gazing into the Infinite. When those eyes fell on you, you felt that Maharaj was probing you to your innermost nature, and that he knew all your weaknesses and failings. But this sensation of being known through and through did not make you afraid, because those eyes were so full of mercy and love. We never feared to be known by him. Then at other times, though his eyes were wide open, it was as if the universe did not exist for him. He seemed to be living in a different world from ours.

His hands and feet were beautifully formed, and they possessed a peculiar attraction. His back strikingly resembled the back of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Turiyananda once told me how, many years after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, he saw Maharaj from behind, walking in the grounds of the Belur Monastery, and mistook him for Sri Ramakrishna himself.

Once in a crowded railway station I overheard a man who had been observing Maharaj exclaim to his friend: "Look at that man! What part of India does he come from? He isn't like a Madrasi, or a Parsi, or a Bengali, or a Punjabi. Can you guess his nationality?".

And the other answered: "No, I can't. But you can see very well that he is a man of God."

HIS CHILDHOOD AND LIFE WITH THE MASTER

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA was born on January 21, 1863, at Sikra, a village near Calcutta, Bengal. His parents were Ananda Mohan Ghosh and Kailas Kamini. Kailas Kamini, his mother, was devoted to Krishna and she spent most of her time in prayer, worship and meditation. Maharaj was her only son. Being a devotee of Krishna, she named him Rakhal, 'the shepherd boy'. She passed away when Rakhal was five years old.

Rakhal liked being with other children and playing all kinds of games with them. He was especially fond of 'playing church'. He would mould a clay image of Mother Kali and worship Her with his playmates. During religious festivals in the temple of Mother Durga, which his ancestors had built, he would take his seat behind the priest. Sometimes, while watching the worship, he would be filled with a fervour of devotion and become absorbed in the thought of Divine Mother.

Ananda Mohan loved gardening. As a child, Rakhal would work with his father, and learned gardening from him at an early age. He was always eager to catch big fish, and would sit patiently with his fishing rod for hours by the pond. We saw how, in later life, he never lost these two enthusiasms of his childhood—gardening and fishing.

From boyhood, he was a lover of music. He learned songs about Divine Mother and Krishna. He and his friends would retire into a mango grove and sing these songs together in chorus. In later years, he encouraged his disciples to sing devotional songs, and he would always have in his company a few who were expert musicians. Wherever he went, praises of the Lord would be sung.

When Rakhal had finished his studies at the village primary school, he came to Calcutta to begin grammar school. He was then twelve years old. Attached to this school was an athletic club, which interested Rakhal very much. The members of the club were young boys and Naren (later known as Vivekananda) was their leader. This was how Rakhal and Naren met. They were of the same age and became very fond of each other. Later both boys became pupils at a gymnasium directed by one Mr. Guha.

At this period Keshab Chandra Sen was exercising a great influence over the youth of Bengal by his powerful oratory, his fervent devotion and his vast knowledge of Eastern and Western religions. He was the leader of the Brahmo Samaj movement. He preached the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In his talks, he would quote the Upanishads and the Christian Bible; his new line of approach revived an interest in religion amongst the educated classes of Bengal. The creed of the Brahmo Samaj preached that theistic conception of the Godhead which is the exclusive creed of Christianity and which is also to be found, among many other conceptions, in the Hindu scriptures. Keshab denounced as polytheism the Hindu cult of many gods and goddesses, although these are really aspects of the one Brahman. He was opposed to the worship of their images in the temples. Naren and Rakhal joined the movement and subscribed to its creed.

Rakhal used to spend most of his time in prayer and contemplation, neglecting his studies. "God is our Father, our very own. How shall I reach

Him?" This was the only thought that occupied his mind. Sri Ramakrishna used later to say of him: "Rakhal was born with an intense love for God. Such a love is usually acquired only when a man has practised spiritual disciplines for many years, or many lives." Rakhal regularly attended the services of the Brahmo Samaj. His prayer that God might be revealed to him continued incessantly throughout the day like the act of breathing.

Rakhal reached his sixteenth birthday. He was not doing well at school. His father, worrying about the boy's future, thought that it must be the emotionalism of adolescence which turned his son's mind toward God and that this was the reason why he neglected his studies. If Rakhal got married, the father said to himself, his mind would be brought down to earth. He would have to consider taking up a career and providing for his wife, and therefore he would study harder. So he arranged for Rakhal's marriage to a young girl named Visweswari.

Keshab Chandra Sen was the first to preach publicly the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. Devotees began to flock to the temple of Dakshineswar to visit the Master. Among them were

Manomohan Mitra and Shyamasundari, the brother and mother of Visweswari. At the time of Rakhal's marriage, these two were already ardent devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, whom they regarded as an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya. Thus it came about that the worldly influence of marriage combined with the spiritual influence of Keshab to bring Rakhal to the feet of his future beloved Master.

It was natural that Manomohan should bring Rakhal, his new brother-in-law, and introduce him to Sri Ramakrishna. Some while before their visit, the Master had had spiritual visions concerning his future disciple. Once, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother: "Mother, I want someone to be my constant companion. Bring me a boy who is pure-hearted and intensely devoted to You." A few days later he saw in his mystic vision a boy standing under the banyan tree in the temple grounds. On another occasion, this same boy appeared to him in a different manner. To quote the Master's own words: "A few days before Rakhal came to me, Mother placed a little boy on my lap and said: 'This is your son.' At first I was startled: 'My son?' Mother smiled at this and made me understand that I was not to have a son in the ordinary physical sense, but that this boy would be my spiritual son. He would live up to the highest ideal of renunciation."

From this hour onward, Sri Ramakrishna waited eagerly for the coming of his spiritual son. A few moments before Rakhal actually arrived, he had another vision. Suddenly he saw a lotus blooming with a hundred petals on the bosom of the Ganges. Each of its petals shone with exquisite loveliness. On the lotus, two boys were dancing with anklets on their feet. One of them was Sri Krishna himself. The other was the boy he had seen in his earlier vision. Their dance was indescribably beautiful. Every movement they made seemed to splash foam, as it were, from an ocean of sweetness. Sri Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy.

Just then a boat arrived carrying Manomohan and Rakhal. Sri Ramakrishna looked at Rakhal with bewilderment. "What is this?" he thought to himself. "Here is the boy I saw standing under the banyan tree; here is the boy Mother placed on my lap; here is the boy I saw just now dancing on the lotus with Sri Krishna. This is the pure-hearted companion I prayed for to Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna regarded Rakhal for a few moments in silence. Then he smilingly remarked to Manomohan: "There are wonderful possibilities in this boy." After this, the Master talked to Rakhal for some time, as though he were an old friend.

"What is your name?" he asked.

Rakhal answered: "Rakhal Chandra Ghosh."

Hearing the name 'Rakhal', Sri Ramakrishna was deeply excited, and muttered to himself: "Rakhal! The shepherd boy of Brindaban—the playmate of Sri Krishna!"

Then, in a sweet affectionate voice, he said: "Come and see me again."

In the presence of the Master, Rakhal had experienced a peculiar feeling of joy, love and intense attraction. As he left the temple grounds, that voice in all its sweetness kept echoing within his heart: "Come and see me again." Rakhal knew that at last he had met a man who had seen and known God.

Rakhal went back to his home and to school, but he could not forget his visit to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna filled all his thoughts, and he was impatient to see him again. A few days later, after school hours, he went alone to

Dakshineswar. The Master welcomed him eagerly and said with great affection: "Why didn't you come back to me sooner? I have been waiting for you." Rakhal did not know what to answer. He looked at the Master and felt that same ecstatic joy. It was as though he were a little child, sitting at the feet of God, the Father of all. From that day onward, the relationship between these two was established. Rakhal saw in Sri Ramakrishna Father, Mother, and God. Sri Ramakrishna saw in Rakhal the Divine Child.

Rakhal's visits to the Master became more and more frequent. Sometimes he lived at the temple for days together. While he was there, his mind entirely forgot the everyday world, and became absorbed in the consciousness of God and His presence. He felt himself to be the eternal companion of his Divine Master.

Recalling these early days with Rakhal, Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his intimate disciples: "No words can describe Rakhal's spiritual mood at that time. He was living in a trance, as it were. He was like a little child, helpless in its mother's arms and surrendering itself completely to her—always conscious of the divine relationship. And when he was near me, I also was transported into a higher spiritual consciousness. I used to play with him, just as Yasoda, the Divine Mother, played with her Divine Child, Krishna."

Rakhal's father, Ananda Mohan, tried in many ways to bring his son's mind back to the interests of worldly life. He gave him strict orders not to go to the temple at Dakshineswar. When his advice and threats were of no avail, he had Rakhal locked in the house. Rakhal longed to go to his Master, and Sri Ramakrishna prayed earnestly to the Divine Mother that all the obstacles in Rakhal's spiritual path might be removed.

One day, Ananda Mohan made Rakhal sit beside him in his study while he looked over some legal documents. Soon Rakhal noticed that his father was deeply absorbed in the work. He seized this opportunity to slip out of the room and hurry off to his Master.

Ananda Mohan knew that Rakhal must have gone to Sri Ramakrishna. But for some days he could do nothing, because he had to attend to a law-suit in the courts. As soon as he had time, however, he went to Dakshineswar, intending to fetch his son home. When Rakhal saw his father coming, he was frightened and wanted to hide. But Sri Ramakrishna would not let him. So Rakhal, following his Master's advice, went to meet his father and greeted him with unusual affection and reverence. It was then that Ananda Mohan had a change of heart. He did not any longer insist on Rakhal's returning home. He only requested Sri Ramakrishna to send the boy occasionally to see him.

So Rakhal began living with the Master at Dakshineswar. One day, his young wife came to the temple with her mother. Sri Ramakrishna looked at her and said: "She is born with a divine nature. She will never be an obstacle to Rakhal's spiritual progress." The Master then sent word to Holy Mother, who was also living at the temple, that she should bless the young girl and welcome her as her daughter-in-law. After receiving blessings from Holy Mother, the mother and daughter went back home.

Rakhal, with a care-free mind, devoted himself to a contemplative life and the service of his beloved guru.

One day, Rakhal told Sri Ramakrishna that he felt very hungry. There was no food in the place. Sri Ramakrishna became greatly concerned. Leaving his room, he went to the bank of the Ganges and shouted: "Gourdasi, come soon! My Rakhal is hungry!" Shortly after this, Gourdasi, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived by boat with a few other disciples, bringing food. Sri Ramakrishna was as happy as a child, and called Rakhal, saying: "Here's food. Go and eat. You are very hungry."

Rakhal felt embarrassed and said in a low voice: "Yes, I *am* hungry—but do you have to advertise it?"

Sri Ramakrishna innocently replied: "If you are hungry, what is wrong in saying you need food? Go and eat now."

Once, while Rakhal was massaging Sri Ramakrishna with oil, he begged the Master to grant him the power of transcendental vision. At first, Sri Ramakrishna took no notice of his request, and remained silent. When Rakhal persisted, the Master suddenly turned and spoke to him very harshly. Rakhal felt hurt and angry. He smashed the bottle of oil on the ground and ran away. But as he reached the gate of the temple his feet suddenly seemed paralyzed. He could not move another step. Helplessly, he sat down on the road, not knowing what to do. Meanwhile, Sri Ramakrishna sent his nephew, Ramlal, to find

Rakhal and calm his anger. Ramlal fetched Rakhal and he slowly returned to the Master's presence. Sri Ramakrishna looked at him smilingly: "You see? You couldn't go outside that circle I drew around you!" Rakhal felt ashamed and remained silent.

A few moments later, Sri Ramakrishna went into ecstasy and began to speak to the Divine Mother. "O Mother," he murmured, "I know You have given him one sixteenth part of Your power; and that power in him will benefit all mankind."

Then, in the same ecstatic mood, he addressed Rakhal, saying: "You were angry with me. Do you know why I made you angry? There was a purpose in it. Medicine acts only after the sore has been opened." He continued: "Have faith that God is also with Form. He can be seen in that way. Mother is revealed to the man who has controlled his mind."

A few days later, while massaging his Master's feet, Rakhal suddenly lost his external senses and was transported into that supersensuous realm which he had longed to experience. In later years, Sri Ramakrishna used to point out the exact spot in the room where Rakhal went into ecstasy for the first time.

Naren (Vivekananda) met Sri Ramakrishna about six months after Rakhal's arrival. Rakhal and Naren were happy to be together again at the feet of their Master. But Naren was shocked one day when he saw Rakhal follow Sri Ramakrishna into the temple of Mother Kali and prostrate himself before the image. For he remembered how Rakhal had signed the pledge of the Brahmo Samaj, promising not to worship images or forms of God. At the first opportunity, Naren reminded Rakhal of his promise and scolded him severely for indulging in image worship. Rakhal was silent. How could he ever make Naren understand what he had experienced through his Master's grace? Yet he could not argue the matter. So, for a few days, Rakhal avoided Naren, and Naren would not speak to Rakhal. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this, and learned the reason for the quarrel. Then he talked affectionately to Naren and made him realize that Rakhal was not responsible for the change in his attitude toward the images. The boys became friends again.

Two years passed away in the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna. Rakhal was living such an intensely spiritual inner life that he had forgotten his duty to his young wife. Shyamasundari, his mother-in-law, understood him, however, because of her own devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. She knew how pure Rakhal was, and how devoted to God. She was training her daughter to be a worthy wife. A neighbour once said to her: "It seems your son-in-law is turning into a monk. Why don't you try to bring his mind back to the world, for your daughter's sake?"

"What can I do?" Shyamasundari answered. "Everything depends on the will of the Lord. If my son-in-law becomes a monk, I shall regard it as a great blessing."

Soon after this, Shyamasundari came with her daughter to visit Rakhal and asked him to return home. The meeting took place in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, who remained silent throughout. Later, the Master described it to his other disciples and said: "Rakhal has now reached true spiritual discrimination. I know he will no longer be attached to the world. He has realized the emptiness of earthly pleasures."

The Master felt, however, that Rakhal had a duty to his wife. He told him to visit her from time to time. Rakhal obeyed. Gradually, his visits to his wife became longer. He felt concerned about her and her future. He came to Sri

Ramakrishna and asked his advice. The Master listened to everything he had to say, but refused to tell him definitely which path of life he should follow. With a heavy heart, Rakhal went back to his wife and silently prayed to Sri Ramakrishna to show him the way. Three days passed. Rakhal prayed unceasingly. Suddenly, a veil was removed from his sight and he saw the Divine Maya—the play of Divine Mother. He knew now which path to choose. He and his wife were not to be bound by the ties of marriage. He had a greater mission to fulfil. He was certain, now, that his wife would be taken care of; and, strangely enough, she also felt full of peace. He took leave of her and went straight back to Dakshineswar. The Master knew exactly what had happened. Silently smiling, he welcomed home his beloved spiritual son.

Sri Ramakrishna knew that Rakhal could not be bound by any earthly attachment. Yet there remained in him a subtle, lingering desire. This desire could not be completely removed from Rakhal's heart until it had had some satisfaction. That was why Sri Ramakrishna had told Rakhal to go back to his wife. Now he knew that, henceforward, Rakhal would be completely free from desire in any form.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The virtue of truthfulness is most important. If a man always speaks the truth and holds on to the truth tenaciously, he will realize God; for God is Truth. I prayed to the Divine Mother, saying: 'Mother here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance—take them both and give me pure love for Yourself. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity—take them both and give me pure love for Yourself. Here is Thy good, here is Thy evil—take them both and give me pure love for Yourself.' not: 'Here is Thy truth, here is Thy untruth—take them both.' I could not say that."

One day, Sri Ramakrishna said to Rakhal: "I can't look at you. I see a veil of ignorance over your face. Tell me, have you done anything wrong?"

Rakhal felt very worried. No matter how hard he tried, he could not remember anything. "Try to recall," Sri Ramakrishna said to his disciple, "if you have told any untruth." Rakhal at once remembered and admitted that he had recently told a fib in a joking conversation with a friend. Sri Ramakrishna forgave him, but said: "Never do it again. To speak the exact truth always is a most important spiritual discipline."

Rakhal's enthusiasm for the spiritual life did not weaken but after a while he ceased to meditate regularly. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this and asked him the reason. Rakhal answered: "I don't always get the inspiration. My heart seems dry, and I feel an emptiness."

"You must never neglect your meditation on that account," Sri Ramakrishna told him. "Make up your mind to practise spiritual disciplines. Then the enthusiasm will come naturally. Those who are farmers by birth and occupation do not and cannot give up farming just because the crops fail. So you must not give up meditation even though you may not get any apparent results. You must be regular in your practice."

That same day, Sri Ramakrishna went as usual to worship in the temple of Mother Kali. Rakhal followed him, and sat down to meditate in the hall facing the shrine. Suddenly he saw the shrine grow strangely luminous. The illumination increased in strength until it was bright as the sun itself, but mellow, not dazzling. This light began to flood through the door of the shrine and seemed about to engulf Rakhal. He was on the verge of losing consciousness. The sensation frightened him. He got up and went out.

Later, Sri Ramakrishna found him sitting silently in his room. "Why did you run away?" the Master asked. "You complain that your heart is dry and that you don't have any more spiritual visions. But you are afraid to see anything. That's not right."

A few days after this, Rakhal was sitting absorbed in meditation in the hall of the temple, and experiencing an ecstatic joy. Sri Ramakrishna approached him in ecstasy and gave him a special mantram for his own use. "Look," said the Master, "there is your Chosen Ideal!" Rakhal in ecstatic vision saw his Chosen Aspect of the Godhead standing before him—living and luminous, with a smile playing on His lips. When Rakhal regained his external consciousness and saw Sri Ramakrishna, he prostrated himself at his feet with loving devotion. Then he knew the divine power and grace of his guru. Sri Ramakrishna returned to his room, and Rakhal became once more absorbed in meditation.

On another occasion, while Rakhal was meditating, his mind became very dry and restless. All his struggles to calm it were of no avail. Disheartened, and disappointed at his own failure, he rose from his seat. Then Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said: "I see an obstacle on your path. Put out your tongue." Rakhal obeyed. The Master drew some lines on his disciple's tongue with his finger and said: "Now go and meditate." Rakhal found himself freed from his distractions.

During this period, Sri Ramakrishna taught Rakhal many kinds of spiritual disciplines, and Rakhal used to practise them with great earnestness—but always in privacy and solitude. Often, when Sri Ramakrishna and his devotees were together, a mood of spiritual fervour would come over the whole group. Then Rakhal would go into ecstasy. Once, at the house of Balaram, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the devotees were chanting the name of God, and the Master was in samadhi. Rakhal was in ecstasy, lying apparently unconscious. When Sri Ramakrishna came out of samadhi, he touched Rakhal on the heart and thus brought him back to normal consciousness.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "M." records some remarks the Master made about Rakhal's spiritual condition at this time:

"Rakhal has grown into a very sweet character now. He practises japam unceasingly—that is the reason you see his lips moving sometimes.

When I look at him and notice his mental condition, I often feel inspired and lose myself in ecstasy.

"Naren, Rakhal and a few others belong to the class of the 'Ever-perfect'. They are born with God-knowledge. As they begin to grow up, they realize the emptiness of earthly pleasures. The Vedas tell us of a bird called the Homa. This Homa bird lives high in the sky: it never comes down to earth. It lays its eggs in mid-air, but at such a great height that the egg hatches while it is still falling. The little bird comes out and finds itself dashing down toward the earth. When it sees the ground rushing to meet it, it soars up and rejoins its mother in the sky.

"Boys like Rakhal resemble the Homa bird. From their earliest childhood they see the emptiness of the world and their one thought is how to reach God."

Sri Ramakrishna also remarked: "Rakhal at one time became very sensitive to people. He could not bear the sight of those who were worldly-minded. I too went through the same mood at one time. Rakhal had another mood in which he loved to be alone and taste the divine bliss in complete absorption. At such times, he told me he could not bear even my company. He came here to look after me, but while he was passing through this state, I had to look after him."

During this period, Rakhal had some visions, and developed various occult powers. But, following his Master's advice, he learned to pay no attention to them.

To quote his own words: "While I was with the Master, a man who was living in the temple fell sick. He had no one to look after him, so I nursed him for a few days. One night, when I was sitting beside him, his suffering became intense. I did not know how to help him out of it, so I thought I would repeat the Lord's name and pray for his relief. After I had made japam for some time, a kind of slumber overcame me. In that state I saw a beautiful young girl, about twelve years old, standing before me. She had the look of a goddess. I asked her: 'Mother, will this man be cured?' She nodded and answered: 'Yes.' The vision disappeared instantly. Next day, the patient recovered."

Just as the inside of a cupboard can be seen through its glass doors, so Rakhal could see into any man's heart. He was aware of the character and motives of everybody who visited the temple. And therefore he would refuse to allow any but sincere, earnest people to enter the Master's presence. Sri Ramakrishna learned that Rakhal possessed this power, and how he was using it. He scolded him severely, saying: "It is mean to use your power this way. He who pays heed to occult powers becomes unable to live in God-knowledge. Take no notice of such powers when they come to you."

In later years, a gentleman once objected to Swami Sharvananda, a disciple of Maharaj, that they were not real holy men, because they did not possess occult powers. When this was reported to Maharaj, he said: "It is easy to acquire occult powers, but hard indeed to attain purity of heart. To find purity of heart is to know the real truth of religion."

There now arose a new obstacle to Rakhal's continued stay with the Master. He became sick, and was sent to Calcutta to live in the house of Balaram. Sri Ramakrishna wanted Balaram to take particular care of his disciple. He told him: "Boys like Naren and Rakhal are born for the divine mission. To serve them is to serve God." Balaram felt very happy to serve his

Master's spiritual child. But the climate of Calcutta did not agree with Rakhal. So, with the permission of Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram took him to Brindaban for a change of air. At first, Rakhal felt better. He found Brindaban very inspiring and wrote speaking highly of it to M. He said in his letter: "What a wonderfully holy place is Brindaban! The wild peacocks are dancing all around. The air is full of singing and dancing and the praises of the Lord. Here you feel an unending joy in the Holy Name!" Then he became seriously ill. This worried the Master. To quote Sri Ramakrishna's own words: "I was extremely worried when I learned of Rakhal's illness at Brindaban. Brindaban is the holy place where Sri Krishna spent his youth. Since Mother revealed to me that Rakhal is the playmate of Sri Krishna and one of the shepherd boys of Brindaban, I was afraid lest Rakhal should be reminded of his past incarnation. If he remembered his association with Sri Krishna while at Brindaban, he might give up his body there. Therefore I prayed fervently to Divine Mother, and Mother told me that I had no need to worry."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna contains this reference to Rakhal's illness:

"Sri Ramakrishna speaks of Rakhal: 'While massaging my feet, Rakhal had his first ecstasy here. A scholar was with me, expounding the Bhagavatam. As Rakhal listened to the words of the Scripture, he began to feel ecstatic joy. Then he lost consciousness and became still.

'His second ecstasy was at Balaram's house. He fell on the ground, apparently unconscious. Rakhal is a devotee of a very high order—he dwells in the realm of the Personal Aspect of God. If he hears people talking about the Impersonal, he goes out of the room.

'I prayed to Divine Mother for his recovery. He has renounced everything and he depends entirely on me.

'He has written to M. from Brindaban, saying how wonderful the place is and how the peacocks are dancing around. But now those peacocks seem to hold no charm for him.

'Why do I love these boys so much? Because their hearts are so pure.'"

When Rakhal returned from Brindaban, he found that many new disciples had gathered around the Master. Some of them were his old school friends. Soon after this, Sri Ramakrishna fell ill and was finally removed to the Cossipore garden house. Rakhal accompanied him. One after another, several of the young disciples came to live there and look after the Master. It was during this last illness that Sri Ramakrishna formed them into a monastic order, and fired them with the ideal of renunciation. He began to train each one individually, according to his character and temperament. To some, he offered the gerrua cloth, which symbolizes the life of renunciation. Naren and Rakhal were among these chosen few.

The Master was undoubtedly a very sick man, but he remained the source and centre of a strong spiritual current which transformed the lives and characters of those around him. The Cossipore garden house became a place of bliss, and the disciples' hearts overflowed with joy in God.

During this period, Sri Ramakrishna prepared Naren to deliver his message to mankind. He taught him how to train the young disciples and organize the monastic order. Every day he would talk to Naren for hours together. In the course of one conversation, he told him: "Rakhal has the keen intelligence of a king. If he chose, he could rule a large kingdom." Naren took the hint and understood that the Master wanted Rakhal to be their leader. He lost no time in bringing this about. One day, when all the young disciples were seated together, Naren spoke of Rakhal's greatness and announced: "From today, we shall call Rakhal our king." The others gladly agreed, knowing the special love which their Master had for Rakhal, and thenceforward always called him Raja, the king. Later on, disciples and devotees began to call him "Maharaj". When Sri Ramakrishna heard Rakhal's new name, he joyfully approved of it.

The Master now knew that he had fulfilled his mission on earth. On the 15th of August, 1886, he passed into mahasamadhi, the highest state of superconsciousness, merging himself in the Divine Mother, and leaving his earthly body.

AFTER THE PASSING AWAY OF THE MASTER

WHILE the Master was still with them, the young disciples had lived in an atmosphere of continual joy and festivity. They were walking the path of God, Who is Infinite Being, Wisdom and Bliss. They tasted the delight of their Master's presence; and neither the anxieties of the world nor its pleasures and excitements could touch their hearts. "Live in union with Brahman and spread the joy of Brahman all around you." That was the truth the disciples had learned.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew (IX: 15) we read: "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast."

Sri Ramakrishna was taken away from them and they felt a void, an emptiness. The Master had, as it were, lighted candles in their hearts with a torch of blazing fire. Now that the torch was removed, they were conscious of darkness, although the candles were still burning. The candles were not enough for them. They wanted the blazing torch. They wanted to be merged in that blissful consciousness once and forevermore.

Guided by an invisible hand, thirsting for God and fired with the ideal of renunciation, the young disciples gathered together and formed the Ramakrishna Monastic Order in Baranagore.

Naren was the centre and heart of this group. Under his guidance the young disciples engaged in study, discussion and religious practices. Rakhal was put in charge of the monastery and made responsible for its general welfare. Naren and Rakhal loved and respected each other deeply. Once, a young member of the group felt discouraged and wished to leave. Rakhal said to him: "Why do you want to run away? There is such a wonderful atmosphere here. Where else would you find a holy man like Naren? And where else would you find such love as Naren has for us?"

Although some members of the new monastery had already received the gerrua cloth from their Master, they now followed Naren's suggestion and went through the formal ritual of sannyasa—the taking of the monastic vow. Naren became known as Swami Vivekananda, and Rakhal as Swami Brahmananda.[1]

The disciples now devoted themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual practices. Some days they had nothing to eat; and their meals were always scanty. Their only thought was of God, and they would remain absorbed in their meditations almost continuously for days and nights on end.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "M." records the following conversation with Rakhal at the Baranagore Monastery:

"Rakhal and M. were walking in the monastery grounds.

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[1] These were the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order, the immediate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Naren	Swami Vivekananda
Rakhal	Swami Brahmananda
Baburam	Swami Premananda
Yogin	Swami Yogananda
Tarak	Swami Shivananda
Sarat	Swami Saradananda
Sashi	Swami Ramakrishnananda
Hari	Swami Turiyananda
Niranjan	Swami Niranjanananda
Latu	Swami Adbhutananda
Gangadhar	Swami Akhandananda
Sarada Prasanna	Swami Trigunatita
Kali	Swami Abhedananda
Gopal Sr.	Swami Advaitananda
Subodh	Swami Subodhananda

Another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Hari Prasanna, joined the monastic order some years later and became Swami Vijnanananda.

Rakhal: 'Don't waste any more time. Plunge deep into spiritual practices.

'Why have we renounced the world? Some people say if you have failed to realize God, why not go back to the world? But Naren gives the right answer: "Because we could not find Ram, must we live with Shyam and beget children?" Ah, Naren speaks wise words!'

M.: 'What you say is true. I can see that you are filled with a great spiritual longing.'

Rakhal: 'How can I describe the state of my mind? This noon I felt a yearning to go to Narmada and practise austerity. Nothing can be achieved without diving deep into meditation. The outside world is full of distractions. Even Sukadeva, the pure and ever-free, was afraid of the distractions of the world. Even he had to escape from the world.'

M.: 'Yes, the Yogopanishad describes how Sukadeva fled the world—the realm of Maya. It also relates a conversation between Sukadeva and his father, Vyasa. Vyasa advises him to find God while living his life in the world. Sukadeva answers: "The only truth is God." He saw the emptiness of life in the world, the vanity of lust and greed.'

Rakhal: 'Many people mistakenly imagine that it is enough if one avoids the company of women, but Naren expressed the truth beautifully last night. He said: "Woman exists for a man as long as he has lust. When you are free from lust, you do not see any difference between the sexes."'

M.: 'That is true. Children do not see the difference in sex.'

Rakhal: 'That is why I believe we must plunge deep within. To reach enlightenment, a man must transcend Maya, the domain of lust and greed.'"

Most of the young disciples now wanted to retire into complete solitude and live absorbed in God. The divine touch of their Master had already enabled them to experience the transcendental realm. What they had momentarily achieved through his grace, they now wished to win as a permanent possession by their own efforts. They wanted to live altogether in that consciousness. We find Swami Brahmananda eager to go into solitude, live on alms and dwell constantly in union with Brahman.

Maharaj talked to Swamiji (as Vivekananda was usually called) about his intention of living for some time as a wandering monk, surrendering himself completely to God. Swamiji agreed, but wanted Swami Subodhananda to go with Maharaj and look after him. Because of his deep love for Maharaj, Swamiji was always concerned for him and wished him to have someone who would minister to his comforts. Maharaj could not refuse his brother's wish, so he and Swami Subodhananda left together for Benares. They stayed there a month. From Benares they went on to the temple of Omkarnath, by the River Narmada. Here, amidst charming natural surroundings, Maharaj lived continuously in nirvikalpa samadhi for six days and six nights. He remained unconscious of the outside world. When he came back at last to normal consciousness, his face beamed with a heavenly joy. He had experienced God in the impersonal, absolute aspect, and realized the identity of the Atman with Brahman.

The two Swamis went on to Panchavati by the River Godavari, where Sita and Rama are traditionally supposed to have lived during their exile. There is a temple dedicated to them. Here, Brahmananda felt and saw the living presence of these two divine incarnations; while chanting the Holy Name, he became absorbed in samadhi for three days and three nights.

During these periods, Swami Subodhananda used to watch over Maharaj with mingled joy and anxiety. There was a danger that Maharaj might pass out of the body while in samadhi and not return to earthly life. His brother Swami was always careful to prevent this.

From Panchavati, they went on to Dwaraka, the well-known place of pilgrimage. A sacred river flowed through it called the Gomati, in which pilgrims bathed in order to acquire merit. Each pilgrim must pay a dollar tax for this privilege, however, and neither Maharaj nor Subodhananda had any money. A rich merchant recognized them as holy men and offered to pay their tax, but Maharaj refused. He did not want to buy religious merit, and preferred to take his bath in the nearby ocean. This impressed the merchant so much that he also refused to pay the tax and came to bathe with the two Swamis. He then invited them to his residence and entertained them for three days. He offered them money for their further travels, but this also Maharaj refused to accept. So the merchant suggested that he should give them letters of introduction to his agents in different parts of the country, so that their comforts would be attended to wherever they went. But Maharaj would not take the letters. "I need nothing from anybody," he said: "The Lord is my only refuge, and He will look after us." The merchant then gave him a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, which was gladly accepted.

From Dwaraka they visited various places of pilgrimage and finally reached Brindaban. During this second visit to the holy city, Maharaj wrote Balaram the following letter:

"Who can fathom the workings of God—His divine play? Man remains subject to happiness and misery as long as he is bound by Karma. This is the lot of every man—no matter whether he is learned or ignorant, good or wicked. Rare indeed is he who has attained unalloyed bliss! Only a man who is free from all cravings can find unending joy.

"There is more misery than happiness in this world. Most people live in misery. God the Father is loving and kind. Who can explain why His children suffer?

"Man suffers for his ignorance. This ignorance is his sense of ego. When a man is free from this ego-sense, surrendering his life, his mind and his intellect at the blessed feet of the Lord of all, and when he has nothing that he calls his own—he is blessed indeed. That man alone is truly happy.

"Man can accomplish nothing by himself. There is only one thing to be done: pray to God and pray unceasingly. Thus we may forget the ego altogether and remember continually that He alone is real, that He alone is the Truth. Then only can we be freed from ignorance.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'How many love God as they love their own kith and kin? How many even want to love Him?'

"The mind is created out of those three gunas which also make up the outer world. Therefore the mind loves to dwell on worldly thoughts. This is the very nature and stuff of the mind. It is only through divine grace that a man can withdraw his mind from the external world and keep it fixed upon God's Holy Feet.

"I pray to the Lord that I may be completely freed from consciousness of the physical world. Bless me, that I may remain absorbed in the Lotus Feet of the Guru—that is the one desire of my heart."

Here in Brindaban, Brahmananda lived in a state of continuous ecstasy, almost entirely losing his consciousness of the physical world. Subodhananda watched over him, lovingly. Brahmananda rarely spoke to him, for his mind dwelt in another realm. Subodhananda would beg food from door to door and place it silently in a corner of his brother's cell. Brahmananda would rise from meditation at a regular hour, in order to eat something, but if Subodhananda was late and he did not find the food in the usual place, he did not care. He simply returned to his meditation and ate nothing until the next day. Sometimes Subodhananda would collect a rather more luxurious meal, with curries of various kinds. But he noticed that Brahmananda merely satisfied his hunger from one of the dishes and left the rest untouched. This was not because Maharaj was deliberately practising any austerity or mortification of the flesh. He was so absorbed in the thought of God that the taste for food or any other sense-object had completely left him. He ate only to keep the body alive. In later years Maharaj used to say: "It is easy to practise austerity by not allowing the mind to come into contact with sense-objects, but it is hard to get rid of the mental craving itself. And of all cravings the subtle desire of the organ of taste is the most difficult to overcome. A man loses this craving only when he is in a high spiritual state."

Observing Maharaj thus absorbed in contemplation and neglecting food and sleep, Subodhananda one day asked him: "Why do you live so strictly? You are the spiritual son of God Incarnate. The Master has already done everything for you. Through his grace you have attained samadhi. Why do you still have to sit like a beggar, begging for the Lord's grace?"

"What you say is true," Maharaj answered: "The Master did everything for us. But still I find a lack within. This proves that we need repeated practice in order to make the state of samadhi natural and habitual to us. You know Uddhava was a devoted disciple and friend of Sri Krishna. Through Sri Krishna's grace he realized God. And yet Sri Krishna sent him to the Himalayas to live in solitude and contemplation."

Bijoy Krishna Goswami, a well-known saint, who was living in Brindaban at this time, asked Brahmananda the same question. Brahmananda replied simply: "I am only trying to become established in the vision of God which I received through my Master's grace." Bijoy Krishna and Maharaj used sometimes to meet and talk about God.

Subodhananda, who had cared for Maharaj so faithfully, now became eager to live in solitude himself and practise austerity. With the blessings and permission of Maharaj, he went to Hardwar at the foot of the Himalayas.

Maharaj was now alone in Brindaban. But he did not feel lonely. He plunged once more into the consciousness of God. Suddenly, one day, he saw in a vision the shining form of his devoted brother-disciple Balaram standing before him. Balaram was smiling a heavenly smile. Gradually his form was merged into the light of the divine realm. Next day, Maharaj received the news that Balaram had passed away. He felt a pang of grief, for he loved Balaram dearly. Then he realized that this sorrow was also a form of attachment. More strongly than ever he felt a desire to forget the things of the world and plunge deep into the inner kingdom of God. He left Brindaban and began to walk toward Hardwar.

At Hardwar, Maharaj was simply overwhelmed by the breath-taking grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas, and of the Ganges running its course at their feet. Only two miles away is the quiet little village of Kankhal, sanctified by the presence of many monks belonging to various orders, who come there to lead contemplative lives. There Maharaj settled in a little hut not far from the Ganges. The present Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service is now situated on that very spot.

Swamis Vivekananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, Subodhananda and others—the monastic disciples of the Master—were then leading contemplative lives at Hrishikesh, in the same neighbourhood. Before long, they learned that Brahmananda was at Kankhal and all came to visit him. Vivekananda wanted to go to Delhi and asked Maharaj and the rest of his brother-disciples to accompany him. Maharaj could not refuse any wish of Swamiji's, but first he wanted to visit Swami Akhandananda, another brother-disciple, who was living in Meerut. To Meerut, therefore, they all went and spent some memorable days in meditation and study, happy to be in one another's company. Then Swamiji left for Delhi alone; the rest of them followed later.

The lives of holy men, and especially their travels, must often appear curiously aimless to the ordinary observer. Ever obedient to the voice of God within them, they can make no fixed plans, as worldly people do. All their intentions are subject to unexpected change. No sooner were the Swamis gathered in Delhi, than Vivekananda told them that he must go on alone. The inner voice commanded him to seek solitude. "We shall meet again when the Lord wills," he told his brothers, as he said goodbye.

Maharaj now asked Swami Turiyananda to be his companion in pilgrimage. Turiyananda readily agreed, and this pleased Maharaj very much, for Sri Ramakrishna had once told him to "keep company with Brother Hari".

In Hari (Turiyananda), devotion and knowledge were harmoniously developed. Deeply learned in the scriptures, he lived a life of great austerity and immaculate purity. Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of him as a man of renunciation, strictly embodying the ideal of the Gita.

The two Swamis now travelled together, mostly on foot, and visited many sacred temples in the northern part of India. Turiyananda has told us that whenever Maharaj entered any shrine he would be filled with ecstatic devotion for the particular aspect of God to which that temple was dedicated. And ultimately he would have direct vision of the living deity within the temple. In later years, when Maharaj was asked by a disciple if the gods and goddesses are real, he answered: "The one Godhead has many spiritual forms. All these forms are real. A seer can see them and talk to them."

After nearly two years of pilgrimage, the Swamis arrived in Bombay. There they met Kalipada Ghosh, a devoted disciple of the Master who lived in that city. A joyful surprise awaited them, for, at Kalipada's house, was Swamiji himself. Since the parting at Delhi, they had known nothing of his whereabouts. Swamiji was now preparing for his first journey to the United States of America. Before embarking he was requested to go and bless the new-born prince of Khetri. Brahmananda and Turiyananda went with him on the train as far as the Abu Road station. While Vivekananda was with the prince, they visited Mt. Abu, where there is a beautiful Jaina temple. A few days later they returned to the station in time to exchange a few words with Swamiji as his train passed through. This meeting was very short. Swamiji hastily told Turiyananda: "Please go back to the Baranagore Monastery. You are wanted there. Let Raja live alone."

Turiyananda had no time to explain to Swamiji that he could not leave Maharaj alone just then. Brahmananda's spiritual consciousness was tuned so high that he had no regard for his body, and could not look after it. So he remained with Brahmananda and the two of them returned to Mt. Abu, where they lived a life of contemplation. Turiyananda begged food for his brother and watched over him just as Subodhananda had done.

After some time, Maharaj felt that they should return to Brindaban. Here Turiyananda experienced a mood of ecstatic joy. "I am not going to get any food today," he told Maharaj: "Let us see if Radha (the Holy Mother of Brindaban) will feed us." They sat down to meditate. Day and night passed for both in blissful absorption, without any consciousness of hunger or thirst. Next morning, as they rose from their meditation, they saw a devotee approaching them with quantities of food. By this time they were both hungry and ate with relish.

After a few days in Brindaban, they went to Lake Kusum, a solitary place near the Holy City. There are huts on the lake shore where monks can pass their days in solitude and contemplation.

The Swamis lived here for some months, completely forgetting the outer world.

Swami Turiyananda told me of an interesting experience Maharaj had at Lake Kusum. For several nights in succession, he was disturbed, as he sat down to meditate, by peculiar noises and by the falling of pebbles and dust around him out of the air. At length Maharaj saw the spirit of a dead man standing before him. "Why are you disturbing me like this?" he asked. The spirit answered that he had been trying to attract the Swami's attention. He begged Maharaj to liberate him from his pitiful condition. Maharaj replied that he did not know how to do this. "You are a holy man," the spirit told him: "If you will just pray for my release, I shall be liberated." Maharaj did as he was asked. After this, there were no more disturbances.

During his stay at Lake Kusum, Maharaj had the habit of rising at midnight and spending the rest of the night in meditation. One night, however, he felt tired and overslept his usual hour of rising. Some one gave him a push and aroused him. At first he thought that this must be Swami Turiyananda. Then he saw a luminous figure, in the dress of a Vaishnava saint, standing beside him and counting his beads. After this, the figure appeared almost every night, at midnight, and joined him in his meditation. In describing this incident to his disciples, Maharaj once remarked: "Many holy men, after leaving the physical body, live in subtle spiritual bodies, and help earnest religious aspirants in different ways."

Toward the end of the year 1893, Turiyananda received a letter from a brother-disciple, describing Swamiji's success in America and requesting him to come back to the monastery, which had now been moved from Baranagore to Alambazar. Turiyananda read the contents of the letter to Maharaj and asked for his advice. Maharaj agreed that he ought to return. "Don't worry about me," he said: "Go back to the monastery. You are needed there to do the work of the Lord."

So Turiyananda unwillingly took his departure, and Maharaj remained alone a year in Brindaban. During this period, he sometimes took a vow not to ask anyone for food or other necessities of life. Usually an unknown devotee brought food to his door. Then there would be days when he had nothing. Once, while he was sitting in silence, a stranger laid a warm, new blanket beside him. A few moments later another stranger came by and took the blanket away. Maharaj never moved. He smiled to himself, watching the strange play of the Divine Mother.

During the special festivities in memory of Sri Krishna, Brahmananda joined the devotees at a nearby temple. The crowd was chanting the name of God and singing Krishna's praises before the shrine. An aged holy man of the Vaishnava sect was sitting in one corner, counting his beads. Suddenly he turned toward Maharaj and beckoned him to approach, indicating with affectionate gestures that he should sit down beside him. The two began to meditate; as Maharaj became absorbed, he felt the Vaishnava touch his head with his beads. He did this repeatedly, and each time, as Brahmananda received the saint's touch, his hair stood on end and he experienced an ecstatic joy.

By constant practice throughout these years of pilgrimage, Maharaj had at last achieved his aim. The state of samadhi was now his own possession He had won it for himself and he dwelt in it continually. Even in the periods of his normal consciousness, there was, as he said, "a fullness of God" in his heart. All around him, wherever he went, nature seemed to vibrate with joy.

Established at last and forever in God-consciousness, he felt ready to answer the call of worldly duty. One day, he suddenly left for Calcutta, carrying that heavenly joy within his heart.

MAHARAJ AS HEAD OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

THE Return of Maharaj to Calcutta created a stir amongst his brother-disciples. His presence brought to them a new upsurge of spiritual joy. One day he told Swami Premananda: "Though I was very happy in Brindaban, I left the Holy City to live in the monastery here. I want to serve my brothers and mankind. Our Master was the embodiment of supreme love and devotion. Our lives must be such that people all over the world, burdened by earthly sufferings and miseries may learn to take the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna and find rest and peace in him."

When Swamiji, who was still in America, heard of Brahmananda's return to Calcutta, he felt himself freed from any further anxiety about the conduct of the Ramakrishna Order in India. His letters to Maharaj were full of the spirit of universal service. And Maharaj, in his turn, would inspire his brother-disciples. All felt an unbounded confidence in Swamiji and Maharaj, but the love of these two for each other was so deep and so spiritual that no one else could fully understand it. Two years after Brahmananda's return from Brindaban, Swamiji came back from America. A public reception was prepared for him at a house in Calcutta. Maharaj himself was the first to welcome his brother, placing a garland of flowers around his neck. Swamiji, in his turn, touched the feet of Maharaj, quoting a saying from the scriptures: "The son of a guru is to be regarded as the guru himself," (meaning that Brahmananda was the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna). Smiling sweetly, Maharaj touched his feet and returned the compliment with another quotation: "One's elder brother is to be respected like one's father."

Swamiji was then taken to the Alambazar Monastery. He placed in Brahmananda's hands all the money which American devotees had subscribed toward the Indian mission. "All this time," he said, "I have been acting as a trustee. It is a relief to give this back to its real owner—our Raja."

The natures of the two friends were widely dissimilar, and yet, in a sense, complementary. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "Naren dwells in the realm of the Absolute, the Impersonal. He is like a sharp, drawn sword of discrimination. Rakhal dwells in the realm of God, the Sweet One, the Repository of all blessed qualities. He is like a child on the lap of his mother, completely surrendering himself to her in every way."

Vivekananda was like the flaming fire, the midday sun—burning up all evil and impurity. Brahmananda was like a soft, cool light, soothing the aching heart. Vivekananda was like the deep and restless ocean—always eager to do the work of the spirit, always fighting against ignorance and superstition. Brahmananda was like the blue sky, vast and patient in spirit. The manner of his working was inward and silent.

Swamiji laid the foundation for the spiritual undertaking entrusted to him by his Master; Maharaj built its edifice. Swamiji, with his dynamic, aggressive personality, could wake a man from the sleep of ignorance; Maharaj with his characteristic serenity could show him the way to mould his life in God.

Each paid memorable tribute to the other. "Through Swamiji," said Brahmananda," the world has come to know of Sri Ramakrishna. But for him, very few could have understood our Master's genius." And in the words of Swamiji:

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"Raja is the greatest treasure house of spirituality." Once a European devotee came to visit Swamiji in the monastery, wishing to have his spiritual problems solved. Swamiji sent him to Maharaj, saying: "There is a dynamo working and we are all under him." After talking to Maharaj, the devotee expressed his gratitude and told Swamiji that all his doubts had been removed.

Swami Saradananda rightly remarks: "If Swami Vivekananda was loved and cherished by the Master as the means by which his spiritual mission was to be proclaimed to the world, Swami Brahmananda was no less valued by him as the future head of his organization."

We have already described how, before visiting America, Swamiji had spent more than two years as a wandering monk, travelling the length and breadth of India. It was at this time that he came to understand the inner source of his country's strength, for he saw how the masses still held fast to the ancient ideals of religious life. But he saw also the miserable poverty, the lack of education and all the evils that accompany them. Swamiji's heart thrilled with pride in his country's spiritual greatness, and bled for its material distress. When he came to the West, he found the picture exactly reversed. On the one hand, physical comfort material prosperity, high standards of education, all the achievements of the human intellect: on the other hand, spiritual poverty, and a failure to understand life's only purpose—the unfoldment of the God within man. He saw, in short, that the West had failed to accept whole-heartedly the ideals of Jesus Christ. The perfect civilization, Swamiji realized, consists in blending and harmonizing the genius of the East with that of the West. Expressed philosophically, it is the blending of the active and the contemplative life.

When Swamiji returned to India, he talked to his brother-disciples, giving a new expression to the ideals for which Sri Ramakrishna had stood. It is not enough, said Swamiji, to devote your entire life to the realization of God for yourself alone. You must also live " for the good of all, for the happiness of all." Swamiji wished his brothers to combine contemplative life with life of service to mankind. Brahmananda was the first to recognize the depth and scope of Swamiji's ideals, and he gave them his full support.

On the first of May, 1897, Swamiji called a representative meeting of the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. At this meeting, the organization known as the Ramakrishna Mission was formed. Maharaj was elected president of the Calcutta Centre. Later, early in 1902, before the passing away of Swamiji, he was made head of the Order, and he held that office for more than twenty years, until his passing away. The phenomenal growth of the Mission during his lifetime is too well-known to need recording here. Whenever India has suffered any great flood or famine or other calamity, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order have come forward to relieve the distress of the people. Besides its innumerable emergency relief stations, opened temporarily, it has established permanent charitable and religious institutions all over the country. Preaching centers and monasteries have also been opened in Europe and in North and South America. At the beginning of 1899, the permanent headquarters of the Mission were established at Belur on the Ganges, now well-known as the Belur Math.

Foreign visitors to India have spoken highly in appreciation of the Mission's success in social service. To the monks of the Order, however, such success can be only of secondary importance. Maharaj always insisted on this: "The one purpose of life is to know God. Plunge deep into the sea of bliss and become immortals. Attain knowledge and devotion, then serve God in mankind. Work is not the end of life. Disinterested work is a means of attaining devotion. Meditate, meditate, and dive deep within. Know that God alone is real. Keep at least three-fourths of your mind in God. It is enough if you give one-fourth to service. Work and worship."

A young disciple of Swamiji, inspired by his ideals of renunciation and service, devoted himself to nursing the sick and helping the poor. From a very humble beginning, his work grew into a huge organization. For many years this disciple was the head of one of the largest homes of service in India under the Ramakrishna Mission. But when Maharaj saw that his work was becoming more important to him than his spiritual life, he relieved him of his post, inspired him with the ideal of God-realization, and sent him away to live a life of exclusive meditation.

To quote Maharaj again: "Yes, you must work. But I insist that you devote yourselves to spiritual practices and meditation. Even though I may not ask you to work, your nature will force you to work. But it is difficult to engage the mind in contemplation of God; but you are monks, therefore, work must not be the sole purpose of your lives."

Once, a millionaire, who had lost his wife, came to the monastery and said he wished to renounce the world and give up all his wealth to the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Premananda reported this to Maharaj, who folded his hands and said gently: "Brother, a wordly, man who associates with a holy man like yourself naturally becomes inspired by the ideal of renunciation. Shall we in our turn become worldly because we have met a worldly man?" Maharaj refused to accept the money, for he knew by his insight that the millionaire would later regret his offer, being, as he was, very much attached to his wealth.

In the same way, he refused to accept a gift of real estate, knowing that the emotion which prompted the offer was merely temporary. He realized that the work of the Mission could not prosper unless it was founded on a firm spiritual basis.

Maharaj was more interested in the spiritual growth of his disciples than in their efficiency. He once reprimanded a senior disciple who had been put in charge of a younger brother, saying:

"Did I send you this young boy to make a good clerk out of him?" On another occasion, when a senior disciple of Swamiji was taking one of the younger disciples to task for negligence in some duty, Maharaj overheard the conversation and told him: "Of course, it is wrong if this young man neglects his allotted duty. You have the right to scold him for that. But tell me, do you ever inquire if he is doing his duty to himself? Do you ask him if he is meditating regularly or if he has any difficulties in his progress towards God? Is the work of the Mission more important to you than this boy's spiritual growth?"

No doubt Maharaj held that the ideal of selfless service, of serving God in man, is a form of worship. But he also pointed out that, without the practice of meditation, it is hard to work as worship and that it is utterly impossible to annihilate the ego simply by actions, however selfless they may be. We must act but we must also try by our meditation to merge the ego in God.

Jesus said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." But really to love mankind an aspirant must also learn to love God with all his heart, his soul and his mind. Maharaj once told me:

"My boy, devote yourself to spiritual practices. Attain knowledge and devotion. Then you will see how your heart will overflow with love and sympathy for mankind. You will also find out how unnecessary is man's suffering, carrying as he does this mine of bliss within himself."

Maharaj kept a watchful eye on the progress of each member of our Order. He turned our hearts continually toward God and directed our actions and the activities of the Mission toward the integrating of that inner strength which alone can benefit mankind physically, morally and spiritually.

When young men of varied temperaments live together, it is only natural that there will be misunderstandings from time to time, no matter how high their common ideal may be. In one of our monasteries, connected with a Home of Service, there were a number of young members, not yet trained, fresh from school and college. When they had been together a while, their old tendencies began to reassert themselves: they formed rival groups and started to quarrel. A senior Swami of the Order went to investigate the whole affair. He questioned everybody and soon found out who were the ringleaders. Then he wrote to Swami Brahmananda telling him that some of these boys were unfit for monastic life, and should be expelled. Maharaj replied: "Don't do anything. I am coming to see to it myself."

When he arrived, he did not question anybody. He simply started living in the monastery. On one thing only he insisted: that all the boys should meditate regularly in his presence. Then he began to instruct them, without making any distinction between individuals, good or bad. Gradually the whole atmosphere of the place improved. The boys forgot their quarrels because they no longer had any time for them. And when Maharaj left, after two or three months, there was perfect harmony in the monastery. Nobody had been expelled. All had become better and more spiritual.

Another time, there were two young monks who quarrelled and came to blows. Swami Premananda heard of it and came anxiously to Maharaj. "Maharaj," he said, "we brother-disciples have lived together in peace and harmony for many years. Never have we fought or quarrelled; never has a harsh word been spoken among us. What shall we do with these boys? Ought we not to expel them?"

"Brother," Swami Brahmananda answered gently, "it is true that they have been making trouble, but remember also that they came here to take refuge at the blessed feet of Sri Ramakrishna. They look to you for counsel and guidance. Surely you can do something for them that will transform their lives and bring love into their hearts."

"You are right," Swami Premananda replied, "they have taken refuge here; but, brother, it is you who must bless them and transform them."

Then Swami Premananda gathered the monks together, seniors and novices alike, and led them in procession to Maharaj. With folded hands, the Swami asked Maharaj to bless them all. As he spoke, Maharaj entered into an exalted spiritual mood. He became deeply absorbed and his right hand was raised in benediction.

Seeing this Swami Premananda asked Swami Shuddhananda, a senior disciple of Swamiji, to prostrate before Maharaj and receive his blessing. Every monk and every initiate followed his example, and Maharaj touched the head of each with his uplifted hand. Speaking from my own experience, I can only say that that touch was like a cooling spring to a fevered body. It gave one an inner exaltation which could be felt but not described. All our troubles were forgotten and our hearts were full of love.

"Keep your mind as high as the mountains," Maharaj told a disciple whom he was sending to a monastery in the Himalayas. He himself lived always in an exalted state of consciousness, which subtly transformed the lives and characters of those around him. If you intensify the spiritual life, your outer life will adjust itself automatically and this principle applies equally to the life of an organization. Maharaj was once asked to make some new rules for the guidance of the young monks. He replied : "Swamiji has already made our rules for us. We do not need to add any new ones. Add more love, attain more devotion and help others to move toward the ideal of God."

As the network of monasteries and homes of service spread over India, Maharaj began to visit them, staying a few months and inspiring everybody by his presence. There was an air of festivity wherever he went. Once, in speaking of him, Swami Turiyananda quoted a verse from the Bhagavatam : "Those who realize the eternal presence of the Lord in their hearts are endowed with goodness and beauty and their lives are a perpetual festival of joy." The Swami added: "Maharaj carries with him such an intense spiritual atmosphere that whoever comes into his orbit is carried towards God as if by a spiritual current and is filled with divine joy." Once a professor who had lived for a week in the monastery which Maharaj was visiting, said to me: "I don't know what kind of people you boys are. But if you can live in the rarefied atmosphere of Maharaj, day after day, you must be great. I can't stand it long, myself. I need to breathe a little worldly air." However, after this, the professor could not breathe his worldly air for long. Maharaj had given him a taste of the joy of God. Soon afterwards, he came back and joined the Order.

Though Maharaj could not be in all the centres at once or live with all his disciples, he kept a watchful eye on everybody. One day he said to me: "Do you think I don't know what you boys have been doing and how you have been faring in the path to God? I may live in one place and seem to be unconcerned, but I know what is happening to each of you. I even know what . . . is doing in America." Maharaj did not possess this knowledge through the ordinary means of communication, but by his extraordinary power. And he was not satisfied with merely knowing: he sent spiritual aid to everyone in due course.

Even if a member of the Order was guilty of some serious offence and there would be talk of his expulsion, Maharaj would forgive his past misdeeds and transform him by his touch. He used to say: "The sins of many births can be wiped out in a moment by one glance from the gracious eyes of God." Once he said to me: "What is morality? If one acquires devotion to God, morality and purity will follow, without our even trying to be moral or pure."

"Practice, practice," he would tell us: "Through practice of the spiritual disciplines, the heart will be purified and a new realm will open. You will realize that God alone is real, and that everything else is unreal. But when, through japam[1] and meditation, a little awakening comes, do not imagine you have achieved the end. Light! More light! Onward! Onward! Attain God! Gain His vision! Talk to Him!"

The success of a religious body depends, not on its external achievements, its efficient organizations, its buildings, the size of its membership or its philanthropic activities—but upon the inner life of each of its members and the measure of their progress toward devotion and God-knowledge. This is the truth that Maharaj, as head of the Order, impressed indelibly upon our minds.

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[1] See Appendix.

MAHARAJ AS GURU

SRI RAMAKRISHNA once said: "When the lotus blossoms, bees come of their own accord to gather the honey. When the lotus of a man's heart blossoms in the joy of God, spiritual aspirants will flock to him." Many times we have watched Maharaj sitting amongst a crowd of devotees. One moment, he would be as joyful and full of fun as a little boy; then suddenly his mind would become indrawn and the whole atmosphere would vibrate with a sense of the presence of God. At such times, those who had come to visit him would find that all their doubts and problems had been solved. They would rise and leave his presence, exalted and comforted, although they had not exchanged a single word with Maharaj himself.

The monastic Order included many disciples of Holy Mother and Swamiji. But most of these had little opportunity of associating with their gurus. Swamiji passed away in 1902. Holy Mother did not live at the monastery. She would tell her disciples to follow the disciplines prescribed by Maharaj. Maharaj himself also accepted disciples, but at first he was very particular. Often he would initiate them only after many years of probation. During the ceremony of initiation, Maharaj would be filled with an ecstasy of love; and the disciple would feel an extraordinary sense of the divine presence.

Holy Mother once complained that Maharaj did not accept enough disciples. It so happened that just then Maharaj was invited to see a play about the life of Ramanuja, which had been written by one of his own devotees. In this drama there is a scene which expresses Ramanuja's great love for mankind. The action is as follows:

Ramanuja's guru initiates him with a sacred mantram, and warns him never to reveal it to any one. "What will happen if I do?" Ramanuja asks. And his guru replies: "Whoever hears this mantram will be liberated from the bondage of his ignorance but you yourself will suffer damnation." Ramanuja goes at once into the temple, gathers a crowd around him, and utters the sacred mantram in the hearing of all. His guru pretends to be very angry, and rebukes him for his disobedience. Ramanuja answers: "If my damnation can liberate so many people, then my supreme desire is to be damned." The guru is delighted. "You are great indeed!" he exclaims. "I give you my blessing." And he declares that the philosophy of qualified monism is to be known, in future, as the Ramanuja philosophy.

This drama and Holy Mother's remark both made a deep impression upon Maharaj. After this, he initiated many more disciples.

Once, while Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda were in Brindaban, a young boy (later Swami Ambikananda) came to visit them. The boy knew Turiyananda already and would talk to him for hours, but he was shy of Maharaj, whom he regarded as very serious and austere. Turiyananda knew this, and one day told him: "Go and prostrate yourself before Maharaj. Touch his feet, and sit by him a while." The boy did so. Maharaj blessed him, touching his head and his back. At once, the boy began to feel differently: all his shyness disappeared. He knew now that Maharaj loved him, and his own heart was filled with love. From that day onward, he was devoted to Maharaj. Maharaj said jokingly to Turiyananda: "You see, I have stolen your disciple!" Turiyananda laughed: "That's splendid!" he said. "The boy is blessed indeed."

Maharaj could recognize his future disciples at first sight, and bind them to him at once with an indescribable love. Even as he met them, he knew which spiritual path each should follow. Two young college boys came to visit him. To one of them, he said jokingly: "Let me see your palm." As he looked at it, he remarked: "You have a tendency toward worldly enjoyments. But, by the Lord's grace, you may be able to overcome it in the end." Swami Premananda, who was present, asked Maharaj to look at the other boy's hand also. He replied, smiling: "I don't need to." This made the other boy (who was later to be known as Swami Yatiswarananda) feel sad. He thought to himself: "My friend has some chance of becoming a monk, but I have none." A few days later, he came alone to visit Maharaj at the Belur Monastery. He met Swami Brahmananda's personal attendant, who told him: "Maharaj said that you would become a monk." And so he did, a few years later. The other boy got married, but remained a devotee.

Before Yatiswarananda became a monk, Maharaj told him: "Give your body and mind to worldly enjoyments, and the world will destroy both your mind and body. Devote them to God and His service, and you will enjoy bodily health and peace and happiness of mind."

This is Yatiswarananda's own description of his initiation: "The day Maharaj was to initiate me, I felt a spiritual power tangibly emanating from him. After the initiation, I bowed down to him. He raised his hand in benediction above my head, giving me instantly a vivid consciousness of an Immanent Presence. I realized that the whole universe was merged in that Presence. That day, also, I got a glimpse of the divine nature and power of the Guru. I was literally translated into a new life. The power he transmitted to me that day is still working within me."

There are some instances of persons receiving initiation from Maharaj in their dreams. This even happened when the dreamer had never seen him in the flesh, but had simply heard about him and felt attracted by his name. One devout young woman had such a dream, and went to see Maharaj to confirm it. She recognized Maharaj at first sight, although he was seated amongst his brother-disciples, and began to describe her experience. When she was about to repeat the mantram she had received in her dream, Maharaj stopped her. "Don't tell me," he said: "I will tell you what it was." This convinced her of the truth of her vision.

A young boy also received a mantram from Maharaj in dream, but unfortunately forgot it when he woke. Soon afterward, he went to Maharaj for initiation. During the ceremony, the dream-mantram returned to his mind. He was delighted and surprised when Maharaj gave him that very same mantram, a few moments later.

There were two ladies belonging to an aristocratic family who both saw Sri Ramakrishna in a dream, although they had never heard or read anything about him. He told them to go and visit Maharaj in Madras. They went, and were initiated. After relating this incident, Maharaj remarked to me: "You see how Sri Ramakrishna does his own preaching? We may think that we work for him—that is just our ignorance."

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous Bengali dramatist who became a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, tells the following story about Brahmananda's extraordinary power: "Compared to myself, Rakhal is only a young lad. I know that Sri Ramakrishna regarded him as his spiritual son, but that is not the only reason why I feel such a deep reverence for him. Once, while I was seriously ill, I found that I had lost my faith in Sri Ramakrishna. My heart felt dry. Many of the brother-disciples came to see me. I told them about the unhappy state of my mind, but they only kept silent. Then, one day, Rakhal came. He asked me how I felt, and I described the dryness and lack of devotion from which I was suffering. Rakhal listened attentively, then he laughed aloud. 'Why worry about it?' he asked me. 'The wave rises high out of the ocean; then it goes down again, and again it rises. The mind is like that.' But please do not worry. Your present mood is due to the fact that you are about to rise to a much higher level of spirituality. The wave of the mind is gathering its strength.' When he left me, all the dryness in my heart was gone. My faith had returned, and my mind rose to a higher level than before."

Although Maharaj had initiated me while I was still a college student, I had no intention of entering the Order. However, during one Christmas vacation, I came to live for a few days at the monastery. Swami Shuddhananda, a disciple of Swamiji, used to urge me to become a monk. But I would argue with him: I thought the monastic life was lazy. I wanted to devote myself to political action, believing that India must be freed from the domination of the British. An old gentleman, who was also a guest of the monastery, used to be present at these arguments. Swami Shuddhananda could never convince me. One morning, as usual, I went to prostrate myself before Maharaj. This old gentleman was also in the room. Suddenly he asked Maharaj: "When is this boy going to become a monk?" Maharaj looked me up and down. His eyes had an unforgettable sweetness. Then he answered quietly: "When the Lord wills." That was the end of my political plans and ambitions. I remained at the monastery.

My own case was not exceptional. Many politically-minded young men who came into contact with Maharaj were inspired by the spiritual ideals of renunciation, service and God-knowledge. They began to realize that the awakening of India would never come through political action, but only through an intensification of the nation's spiritual life—and that this would benefit not India merely but all mankind.

Maharaj had wonderful insight into the character and spiritual growth of individuals. A friend of mine, whom he knew, renounced the world and went to Hrishikesh to practise austerity. He would not accept the guidance of any guru. After a few months' practice, he wrote me, saying that he had attained samadhi. At that time I was with Maharaj at Kankhal, and I told him the substance of my friend's letter.

"Why!" exclaimed Maharaj: "I saw him about ten days ago. I looked into his eyes. He hasn't got samadhi. No doubt, he has had some kind of mystic vision—the vision of a light, perhaps—and he mistakes that for samadhi. An aspirant is often led astray like that, when he has no guru to advise him.

"Samadhi! Is it an easy matter to attain samadhi? We saw Swamiji in samadhi only a few times. Sri Ramakrishna alone was able to live in samadhi almost continuously, day and night."

Then he quoted a verse from the Upanishads: "When a man sees the Supreme Lord, the knots of the heart are cut asunder and all doubts cease to exist."

"Is it ever possible," I asked, "to attain samadhi after a short time?"

"Yes, if a man has lived an absolutely continent life."

Maharaj, with his deep insight, knew the strength and weakness of each of his disciples. He was always ready to help, but he insisted that the disciples must also make an effort. Once, I asked him to free my mind from lust. "I could do that for you," he replied: "but then, by child, you would lose all the joy of struggle. Life would seem insipid."

Sri Ramakrishna himself sometimes rebuked his most intimate disciples, and Maharaj often used this method of training those who were near and dear to him. The chastening of a disciple never began, however, until after he had enjoyed several years of love and kind words. These experiences were painful at the time, but they were later treasured among the disciple's sweetest memories. And even while Maharaj was scolding him, he would feel a strange undercurrent of joy. The indifference of Maharaj was the only thing we could not have borne; and Maharaj was never indifferent. The harsher his words, the more intensely we felt his interest in our welfare. The very fact that he could speak to us in this way proved that we were his children, his own. Sometimes, a disciple would be reproved for quite insignificant reasons, or on grounds that seemed to him utterly unjust. But, as time passed, he would realize that there had been certain tendencies and karmas stored in his sub-conscious mind, and that Maharaj had seen them and was working to annihilate them before they could appear and become harmful. Thus, at the cost of a little unpleasantness, the disciple would be spared years of painful struggle and self-discipline.

There was only one occasion when I felt that I had perhaps lost my Master's love. I could not endure the thought. That night I decided to run away from the monastery and hide myself forever. With this resolve in my mind, I went next morning to prostrate before Maharaj, and silently take my leave of him. I was about to go, when he told me to sit down. For a while, he continued to scold, me, reminding me of all my faults. Then, with a sudden change of manner and great earnestness, he asked: "Do you think you can run away from me? The mother holds the child on her lap and spanks him; and the child cries, 'Mother, mother.'" Never before had I been so deeply aware of his love and protection. All thought of running away was forgotten. His words soothed my burning heart. Then he said: "Our love is so deep that we do not let you know how much we love you."

The truth of this statement was proved to me, as I watched how Maharaj dealt with Hariharananda, another disciple who had been for many years his personal attendant. Hariharananda had begun to depend too much upon the Master; he needed to learn to stand on his own feet. So, Maharaj, with a show of displeasure, sent him away to practise austerity in the solitude of a temple in Southern India. Some years later, Maharaj was in Madras and arranged for Hariharananda to visit him. I was alone with Maharaj throughout the entire evening on which his arrival was expected. He was as restless as a loving mother who was expecting her son after a long absence. At length, Hariharananda arrived, but, fearing that Maharaj was still angry with him, he felt shy and wanted to postpone their meeting until the morning. Knowing the real state of affairs, I insisted that he should see Maharaj at once. However, when Hariharananda came into the room, Maharaj no longer showed any sign of his loving anxiety. He merely greeted his disciple quietly and asked if he had been keeping well.

On another occasion, while I was being reproved in the presence of Ramlal Dada, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, another young disciple entered the room. Maharaj turned to him and said jokingly: "With those glasses on, you look like Keshab Sen." The disciple did not answer, for he saw that I was being scolded. Then Ramlal Dada turned to him and said: "Do you know why Maharaj is rebuking this boy in your presence? There is a saying that the mother scolds her daughter in order to teach the daughter-in-law."

I remember the first time Maharaj ever reproved me. I had failed to do a certain errand for him, because I had not understood exactly what it was he wanted. For this neglect, he scolded me throughout the afternoon. At supper time, Swami Turiyananda was seated with Maharaj and I was fanning them. The scolding continued. I remained silent. Swami Turiyananda turned to me and asked: "Do you know why Maharaj is so hard on you?"

"No," I replied: "frankly, I don't. I do not see how I am to blame."

Then Swami Turiyananda said: "There are three classes of disciples. The third-class disciple merely does the guru's bidding. The second-class disciple does not have to be told. He acts as soon as the thought arises in the guru's mind. But the first-class disciple acts even before the guru has had time to think. Maharaj wants you all to be first-class disciples."

To this Maharaj added simply: "You see, Brother Hari, I am getting old; they don't obey me any more. Please knock a little sense into their heads."

Another time, I did not write to Maharaj because my vanity had been wounded. When he came to Madras from Bangalore and asked me why I had not written, I answered carelessly: "Oh, you got all news of me from Swami Shivananda."

At a glance, he understood my mood, and asked sarcastically: "I suppose you have the key to the treasure-house inside you, and you don't need me any more?" My ill humour vanished immediately. "How can you say that?" I exclaimed: "You know that you hold the key!"

There is a saying that in order to get honey from a honeycomb you must poke it. Maharaj once told me how Sri Ramakrishna, by his mere touch removed the spiritual obstacles that stood in his disciple's path. To this I answered: "Yes—Sri Ramakrishna did all that for *you*. But when our turn comes you can only scold us."

Maharaj shook his head, and said with great sweetness: "No, my boy. You have no need to worry." Then he repeated three times: "I can see how Sri Ramakrishna is doing everything for you."

After this, he began to speak of high spiritual matters. Swami Shivananda and many other monks of the Order were present. He continued to talk in this way for three hours, stopping only when he was told that a householder devotee wanted to see him. He remarked: "Now I can't go on. My mind has come down to a lower level." Later, Swami Shivananda said to me: "Today I learned many things I had not known before—just because you poked the honeycomb of Maharaj."

Sometimes the harsh behaviour of Maharaj toward a disciple amounted to apparent cruelty. Three of us were to be initiated into the monastic Order at the same time. One was a boy who had been greatly praised because he had steadfastly practised spiritual disciplines. We had all noticed his growth. Just as the formal rites were about to begin, Maharaj suddenly turned to this boy and said: "Why are you here? I shall not initiate you. Go away."

My brother-disciple and I were both shocked and felt that Maharaj had been cruel. But the boy himself later admitted that the praise he had received had made him vain. Maharaj, by his drastic action, had killed the seed which might have grown into deadly spiritual pride. For ten days he suffered bitterly. Then he also was initiated.

Maharaj also taught by joking and making fun. Often his humorous remarks contained a deep inner meaning. To one disciple he used to write doggerel verses, and the truths they expressed were sometimes far from pleasant. While in Madras, he used to dictate these poems to me. One of them had a line in it: "I have given that which is holy unto a dog." He told me to mail this poem to the disciple. Its harshness pained me and I spoke of it to Ramlal Dada, saying that I was afraid the feelings of the disciple would be deeply hurt. Ramlal Dada reported my remark to Maharaj. Meanwhile, I had gone to bed, but Maharaj sent for me. He told me to bring the poem and read it to him. I did so, and repeated my objection. Maharaj was silent for a moment. Then he said: "No, send it as it is. He is too thick-skinned to get my meaning any other way." And how right he was! These verses made a deep impression upon the disciple, and awakened his spiritual understanding.

The reproaches of Maharaj were always followed by tenderness and sweetness. I still remember the last words he ever spoke to me. I was cooking a sweet for him and he was walking up and down, close by. He was about to leave Madras. Suddenly, he came over and whispered into my ear: "It makes me feel so bad, having to leave you. I shall miss you very much." Later, at the end of a letter, he repeated those same loving words: "I miss you very much."

"M." once told Vishwananda, a disciple of Maharaj: "Observe how Maharaj acts and you will have some idea of what Sri Ramakrishna was like. When his mind came down to the finite plane, his sense of humour was very keen." This was also true of Maharaj. One of his favourite jokes was to have some fruits or sweets placed beside a disciple who was meditating. When the disciple had finished his meditation, he would find his favourite dishes laid out before him. Later Maharaj would ask: "Well, did you get the fruits of your austerity?"

Often, he would make us all roar with laughter. I remember once, while we were laughing, he nudged me and said, pointing to Vishwananda: "Look! He giggles like a girl!" Maharaj would sometimes remark: "It is good to laugh every day. It relaxes the body and the mind."

The relationship between guru and disciple, according to the Hindu scriptures, is a very sacred one. Maharaj used to say that an enlightened soul must help his disciple until he also becomes enlightened. This tie cannot be broken by the death of the body. After the teacher has passed away, he still continues to watch over his disciples, in spirit. He will not accept his own liberation until all are liberated.

Maharaj was the embodiment of the protective power of the guru. Once, he was walking with another disciple and myself. He was slightly ahead of us. Suddenly we heard a shout: "Out of the way! There's a mad bull!" An instant later, we saw the bull itself, rushing toward us. There was no time to run. My brother-disciple and I tried to get in front of Maharaj, in order to protect him. But he raised his arms and pushed us back. Although he was now an elderly man, he was still extraordinarily strong. There was a moment's pause, as the bull approached with lowered head, and Maharaj stood still, confronting it. Then the bull stopped, shook its head from side to side, lifted it, and walked quietly away.

Swami Akhilananda relates a similar incident which took place at Bhubaneswar. Maharaj had gone for an evening walk in the woods with Akhilananda and another devotee. By the time they turned homeward, it was dark. Suddenly, they saw a tiger coming toward them. Maharaj stood still. The tiger also stopped, about a hundred feet away, and looked at them for some moments. Then it turned and ran off. Neither of the devotees felt frightened. There could never be any fear in the presence of Maharaj.

Maharaj prescribed various disciplines and diverse forms of worship to suit the different temperaments of his disciples. He knew our needs far better than we did. When I first joined the Order, I was inclined to the path of devotion; but Maharaj decided to send me to a monastery in the Himalayas where the ideal of non-dualism is practised and no ritual is allowed. Before I left, he made me read aloud to him a book on extreme non-dualism. Two years later, he sent me to the monastery in Madras where ritual is regarded as very important. But now I had lost all my devotional inclination, and disbelieved in ritualistic worship. After some time, Maharaj paid a visit to this monastery. One day, a devotee brought a large basket of nagalingam flowers to be offered in the worship. Knowing that they were the favourite flowers of Maharaj, I arranged them in his room. Maharaj came in, saw what I was doing, and asked: "Have you saved some of those flowers for the worship of the Lord?"

"No, Maharaj," I replied. For I had thought to myself: "After all, the Lord in the shrine room is only a picture, but the Guru is the living God." Maharaj, as usual, read my thoughts, and asked: "Do you think it is merely a picture that is worshipped in the shrine?"

"Yes," I replied, somewhat nervously.

"Have you ever performed the ritualistic worship?"

"No, Maharaj."

"Why not?"

"I am not yet a Swami, and I am not a Brahmin by caste. So I am not allowed to do the external worship in the shrine."

Maharaj became quite excited. "What is all this?" he exclaimed. "Call Sharvananda."

Swami Sharvananda was a disciple of Maharaj and head of the Madras Monastery. When he appeared, Maharaj asked him: "How is it that a Brahmachari of this Order is not allowed to do the worship, just because he is not a Brahmin ?"

Sharvananda answered: "Swami Ramakrishnananda was the first head of this monastery. He was very particular that the worship should be performed only by a Swami or a Brahmin."

"It should not be that way," Maharaj replied. "Any one who has been initiated and who has entered the Order is purified in his body and birth. Therefore he should be allowed to do the worship." Then, turning to me, he said: "You will do the worship."

"But Maharaj," I replied, "I do not believe in ritualistic worship. I do not see the living Presence in the picture."

"I am asking you to do the worship now," Maharaj said quietly. "Will you ?"

I obediently followed his instructions and, within a few days, became convinced of the great efficacy of external worship.

Almost his last advice to me was: "Be ritualistic." And he added: "Look at Ambikananda (one of his senior disciples); see how wonderfully he is progressing through the practice of ritualism."

This does not mean, however, that Maharaj asked everybody to practise ritualism. In fact, there are many of his disciples who have never learned the rites of formal worship. Hinduism teaches the value of ritual, but does not say that it is essential to everyone's spiritual progress.

In conclusion, I must mention two quotations which Maharaj never tired of repeating to his disciples. The first was: "Tell the truth, but never a harsh truth." The second was from the teachings of Sri Chaitanya: "Be humbler than a blade of grass, be patient and forbearing like the tree. Give honour to all; take no honour to thyself. Chant the name of the Lord unceasingly."

HIS MYSTIC VISIONS

MAHARAJ once told me: "There are times when it becomes impossible for me to teach any one. No matter where I look, I see only God, wearing many masks. Who am I, the teacher? Who is to be taught? But when my mind comes down to a lower level again, I see ignorance in man and try to remove it."

Maharaj spent most of his later life in a state of high spiritual consciousness. He only came down from it in order to teach and help us. His awareness of God had become so habitual that he would experience mystical visions even while conscious of the external world around him. He rarely spoke of these visions, and when he did so, it was only to his brother-swamis or disciples. I shall record a few of them in this chapter.

It was the year 1901, a few days before the annual worship of Durga—God the Mother in Her aspect as Protectress of the Universe. Maharaj was sitting on the bank of the Ganges at the Belur Math. Suddenly he saw Mother

Durga walking on the surface of the Ganges toward the monastery grounds. She passed under the sacred vilwa tree in the monastery garden and then disappeared. A moment later Swamiji arrived by boat, came to Maharaj and said: " Raja, make arrangements at once for the worship of Mother Durga." Then he told Maharaj that he had a vision, and seen Mother Durga being worshipped at the monastery. Maharaj, in turn, described his own vision to Swamiji, and they began at once to prepare for the worship. Since that date the special worship of Mother Durga has been held every year at the Belur Monastery. Maharaj also performed this worship at the monasteries in Kankhal, Benares, and Madras. He once told Akhilananda that he performed this worship in obedience to the Mother's direct command. Akhilananda records that, during the Durga Festival in Madras, the power of Maharaj was specially felt by his disciples, and their minds were raised to higher levels of spirituality.

Maharaj used to observe Christmas every year by offering special worship to Jesus. The story of the nativity was read aloud from the Bible and followed by meditation. Fruit, bread, cake and wine were offered in the worship.

Sister Devamata, an American devotee who happened to be present on one such occasion, records the scene as follows:

"When I had finished reading, the intense stillness in the air led me to look towards Swami Brahmananda. His eyes were open and fixed on the altar, there was a smile on his lips, but it was evident that his consciousness had gone to a higher plane. No one moved or spoke. At the end of twenty minutes or more, the look of immediate seeing returned to his eyes and he motioned to us to continue the service."

After the service, as Maharaj was partaking of the sacramental food, he remarked to Sister Devamata: "While you were reading, Christ suddenly stood before the altar, dressed in a long blue cloak. He talked to me for some time. It was a very blessed moment."

There is a saying in Sanskrit: "Places of pilgrimage are made holy by the visits of the seers of God." The enlightened soul does not need to visit holy places or temples, for he has realized the living God everywhere. Wherever he lives, that place becomes holy. Nevertheless, we know that enlightened men often journey to shrines and temples. They do so because they find there a greater manifestation of God—a more concentrated revelation, as it were. This spiritual concentration has been caused by the visits of many holy men and women and by the devotion of pilgrims throughout the ages. When a saint goes to a holy place, he contributes his own revelation to the spiritual treasure-house, for the benefit of the generations that will follow.

The temples of India are dedicated to deities, of many forms and aspects, as well as to the Impersonal, Formless Godhead. This one Godhead, Whose name is Silence, comprises all divine forms and aspects, yet is beyond form and definition. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Never set any limit to the Infinite by trying to define It." And indeed, it is evident that Infinite God must have infinite forms of expression. "Truth is one, sages call It by various names," says the Rig Veda, the ancient scripture of the Hindus.

In an orchestra, different instruments play different notes. But these notes harmonize and the combined effect is of one beautiful unity. Maharaj reached this unity through his realization of Brahman. An ordinary mystic may be aware of only one instrument and hear only one note—one part or aspect of the divine whole. The illumined soul, however, hears all the instruments, the entire orchestra. Thus it was that Maharaj, while ever conscious of the one Brahman, was able to see the many divine aspects when he visited the temples dedicated to them.

At Madura, in Southern India, there is a famous temple of Divine Mother. When Maharaj entered it and stood before the deity, he exclaimed: "Mother, Mother!" and lost his external consciousness. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was with him, saw his condition and held him by the arms to prevent him from falling. Seeing Maharaj standing unconscious in ecstasy, the priests and devotees who were present gazed at him in silence. The temple was filled with an intense stillness, which prevailed for an hour or more. Then Maharaj went silently away. Later he described how he had seen the luminous form of Divine Mother. At the Temple of Rameshwar, which is dedicated to Shiva, the formless aspect of God, Maharaj was again absorbed in samadhi. Even when he returned to normal consciousness, he remained for some time in a state of ecstatic joy.

The temple at Cape Comorin is dedicated to Divine Mother in the form of a little girl. Maharaj lived there for several days. Sometimes he would stand motionless before the deity in silence. Then he would become ecstatic and begin to talk to the Divine Mother. Whenever he entered this temple, he lost all external consciousness. In the temple of Vishnu at Tirupati in Southern India, Maharaj had a strange experience. The vision he beheld there was not of Vishnu, but of Divine Mother. On inquiry it was found that the temple had once been dedicated to Mother, and later had been changed into a Vishnu temple through the influence of Ramanuja.

In the temple of Jagannath at Puri, there are three images. Sri Krishna stands on one side, his brother, Balaram, on the other, and Subhadra, his sister, stands in the middle. Here Maharaj once saw the living Krishna on the altar; the three images had disappeared. Maharaj visited this temple many times. Whenever he was there, he seemed to dwell in another realm, and his face shone with a heavenly smile.

Of the many places of pilgrimage, Maharaj loved Brindaban and Benares most of all. He used to tell us that in these two cities, a spiritual current is always flowing, and that this current grows particularly strong at certain times of the day and night. He said that if a man meditates and practises japam in Brindaban at midnight, he will be greatly helped by this spiritual current, and if he meditates in Benares at 4 a.m., he may easily become absorbed into the higher consciousness. In later years when Maharaj visited the temples at Brindaban and Benares, he would ask his disciples to sing and chant in chorus and he himself would pass into ecstasy.

Speaking of Benares, he said: "Many have found enlightenment there. If the aspirant struggles a little to reach union with God, he may get it very easily. Only once did Maharaj initiate a disciple in Benares. After that he always refused to do so, because, as he said: "Lord Shiva gives liberation to all those who live and die here." The disciple, who later became Swami Akhilananda, was once in Benares with Maharaj and wanted initiation. "Holy Mother does not initiate any disciple in Benares," Maharaj told him. "I have made the same rule." Then in a sweet affectionate voice he added: "I will initiate you when I go back to the monastery at Belur. Don't be impatient. In my mind I have already accepted you as my disciple, and have made myself responsible for you."

Once, during the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday at Belur, while the disciples were singing and chanting, Maharaj went into samadhi. He was carried to his room, completely unconscious of the outer world, his face shining with a heavenly radiance. He remained in this condition so long that his brother-disciples became anxious. They told Holy Mother, who was present in the monastery for the celebration. She showed no anxiety but seemed well pleased. "Do not worry on his account," she replied. Then she went to Maharaj, touched his arm lightly and said in an affectionate voice: "Rakhal, I have brought sacramental food for you. Eat, my child." Maharaj immediately returned to normal consciousness and, seeing Holy Mother prostrated himself at her feet.

He used to say: "It is very hard to understand Mother's greatness, unless she herself reveals it. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, one may recognize the Divine Mother in her."

Once, while Maharaj was visiting Holy Mother, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna asked him: "Rakhal, Mother wanted to know from you why a spiritual aspirant must worship the Divine Mother first." Maharaj answered: "Mother has the key to knowledge of Brahman. Unless She shows Her grace and opens the door, no one can enter into the realm of Brahman."

As he left the house where Holy Mother was staying, Maharaj began to sing and dance, clapping his hands, like a little boy. Whenever he was with Holy Mother, he always acted in this childlike manner, which expressed the relationship between them.

Vijnanananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said of Maharaj and his visions: "The gods and goddesses are real, not myths. They are the many aspects of the one Godhead and I know this because Maharaj used to see and talk to them."

Once Akhilananda, who was then a very young boy, was told by Swami Vijnanananda that, when he saw Maharaj, he was to say: "There is something within me that needs awakening—please give me your help." Akhilananda repeated these words to Maharaj, who replied: "Why didn't you ask Vijnanananda to do this awakening for you?" Akhilananda answered that he had, but that Swami Vijnanananda had said: "I have very little spiritual power within me, but Maharaj lives in the powerhouse. He can easily do what you ask." Maharaj looked very serious and said: "Yes, the awakening will come. Don't be impatient. For this awakening one needs initiation."

"Then please initiate me.

"That will be done," Maharaj promised.

To quote Akhilananda's own words: "Maharaj made us feel that spiritual awakening and God-realization are not difficult to achieve. He made us understand that tremendous help will be given us if only we will struggle a little and that we shall easily reach the goal."

Maharaj had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna, not occasionally, but every day of his later life. He used to tell me: "I see Sri Ramakrishna every day and talk to him." To another disciple, he said: "I see Sri Ramakrishna whenever he chooses to reveal himself to me. By his grace, you will also see him and talk to him."

Although Maharaj lived almost continuously in a high state of consciousness, he was very natural and human in his behaviour. Sri Ramakrishna said of him in his early twenties: "Rakhal is like the kind of mango which still looks green outside when it is ripe and sweet within." This was true of Maharaj throughout his life. Whenever possible he would hide his ecstatic mood and act in the most normal way. I have already mentioned his keen sense of humour. Balaram's wife once dreamt that she was feeding Maharaj. Taking this for an omen, she invited him to a sumptuous feast which she herself cooked. When Maharaj had enjoyed the dinner, he turned to her grandson and said: "Tell your grandma to dream more frequently."

On another occasion, a devotee came to take Maharaj to his home in a Rolls Royce car. Maharaj enjoyed the ride very much, and when it was over, he remarked: "In future my motto will be—'Rolls Royce or walk.'"

His love of gardening has been referred to in an earlier chapter. At every monastery he visited, the laying out of the garden was assisted by his expert advice. He would often gaze at the blossoming flowers and remark: "Look! There you see the worship of God in His universal form going on unceasingly."

Many of his householder disciples came to him with their worldly troubles and problems. Maharaj would not only listen to them sympathetically but also give them constructive advice. Successful doctors, lawyers, engineers and other professional men found that Maharaj was capable of discussing their work intelligently with them. They would be surprised to find that he had given them a new angle of approach to their respective jobs.

Even though he was interested in everything and in all the events of his time, his intimate disciples could see, that beneath this apparent interest, Maharaj always remained completely detached. The things of this world rolled off him like drops of water off a lotus leaf.

HIS PASSING AWAY

I HAVE already described how Sri Ramakrishna saw Rakhal dancing with Sri Krishna on a mystic lotus, shortly before the boy's first visit to Dakshineswar. Only a few intimate disciples knew of this vision, and Sri Ramakrishna had warned them never to reveal it to Maharaj, explaining that if he realized his true nature as the Eternal Companion of Krishna, he would leave his mortal body. The secret had therefore been very carefully guarded.

In March, 1922, Maharaj went to Calcutta to stay for some time at the home of Balaram. Balaram himself had already passed away, but his whole family were sincere devotees of Ramakrishna, and his palatial guest-house was at the disposal of all the Swamis and disciples of the Order. It is now regarded as a place of pilgrimage, sanctified by the presence of so many holy men.

While Maharaj was at the guest-house, Ramlal Dada came to visit him. Ramlal Dada was a pure soul and a devotee of a very high order.

During Ramakrishna's lifetime, he had been one of the Master's personal attendants and had served him with great devotion. Whenever he and Maharaj were together, their talk naturally turned to the early days. They would laugh and joke together, for they stimulated each other's sense of fun. One day, Maharaj asked Ramlal Dada to sing for him the songs he used to sing to Ramakrishna. It was arranged that many disciples and devotees should be present to hear the singing.

Ramlal Dada began to sing songs about Krishna and the shepherds and shepherdesses of Brindaban. At first, everyone was very gay as Ramlal mimicked the gestures of the shepherdesses, making his audience laugh. Suddenly, Maharaj, who had also been enjoying the fun, became serious. Ramlal Dada was singing: "Come back, O Krishna, come back to Brindaban. Come and reign in the hearts of your beloved shepherds and shepherdesses. Don't forget that you are a shepherd yourself." At that moment Maharaj seemed transported to a realm beyond this earth. The joking and laughter stopped. The atmosphere became calm and serene. Perhaps, at this moment, Maharaj received a partial glimpse of his true nature, and knew himself to be God's Eternal Companion. The events that followed seem to point to some such revelation.

A few days later, at midnight, Nirvanananda, a disciple and personal attendant of Maharaj, saw his master sitting upon his bed in a very earnest mood. The disciple stood silently before him, waiting for him to speak. Maharaj looked at him, and said: "I woke suddenly and saw Sri Ramakrishna standing just there." He pointed to a spot in front of a couch, adding: "He didn't speak to me. He stood there silently for a while and then disappeared. I don't understand it."

After a few moments Maharaj continued in a low, earnest voice: "I can't give my mind to the things of this world any longer. It wants to take complete refuge in Him and Him alone."

Shortly after this, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated. Maharaj stayed at the Belur Math for the occasion; then he returned to Balaram's house in Calcutta. Two days later he had a slight attack of Cholera, but recovered within a week. This illness which left him feeble was followed by diabetes, which took a serious turn. A number of doctors came to treat him, one of whom wore the religious mark on his forehead.

"Doctor," said Maharaj, "the Lord Shiva, whose symbol you wear on your forehead, is the only Reality. Everything else is unreal."

A devotee asked; "Maharaj, are you suffering very greatly?"

"Please try to realize," Maharaj answered, "that in my condition I have to bear all physical suffering patiently and without complaint." But as he said this, his face seemed to light up with a divine radiance. The pain appeared to have melted away. He lost external consciousness and became absorbed in meditation.

About nine o'clock that same evening, he placed his hand on Nirvanananda, and said: "Don't worry. You have served me well. You shall be merged in God and reach knowledge of Brahman. I give you my blessing that you may attain this."

Then he called all the disciples and devotees who were present to his side. For each he had a blessing and an affectionate word.

"Ah, my children," he told them tenderly: "never forget God, and you will realize the highest good. Don't grieve. I shall be with you always."

Once more he became absorbed in his transcendental vision. After some time had passed, he continued in a sweet, tender voice: "I am floating, I am floating on the leaf of faith and knowledge on the ocean of Brahman. Then suddenly he exclaimed: "Ah! The feet of Sri Ramakrishna—I know them! Viveka, my brother Vivekananda! Premananda. . . Yogananda. . ."

Thus, with his divine sight, he recognized the brother-disciples who had passed away. He was dwelling in that transcendental realm where he had lived throughout his life; but now he no longer concealed the fact. He began to describe his visions.

"Ah," he murmured softly, "the blissful ocean of Brahman! Om! Salutations to the Supreme Brahman! Om! Salutations to the Supreme Atman!"

While he was speaking of his divine experiences, his throat seemed to become dry. A disciple said to him: "Maharaj, please drink this water. It has lemon in it."

"The mind doesn't want to come down from Brahman," said Maharaj slowly: "Pour Brahman into Brahman." Like a child, he opened his mouth for the water to be poured into it.

Then he turned to Swami Saradananda and said: "Brother, Sri Ramakrishna is real. His divine incarnation is real."

After this, Maharaj was silent for a while. His face wore an expression of great sweetness. He was deeply absorbed in meditation. The minds of those who were present were so uplifted that they felt no grief—only joy and silent calm. All sense of the world and of death was lost.

Suddenly, in the midst of the silence, the voice of Maharaj was heard: "Ah, that inexpressible light! Ramakrishna, the Krishna of my Ramakrishna. . . I am the shepherd boy. Put anklets on my feet, I want to dance with Krishna. I want to hold His hand—the little boy Krishna. . . Ah, Krishna, my Krishna, You have come! Krishna . . . Krishna. . . Can't you see Him? Haven't you eyes to see? Oh, how beautiful! My Krishna. . . on the lotus. . . eternal. . . the Sweet One!

"My play is over now. Look! The child Krishna is caressing me. He is calling me to come away with Him! I am coming. . ."

The tenderness and heavenly compassion that filled his heart were expressed in every word he uttered. The whole atmosphere of the large hall where he was lying seemed to vibrate with this emotion. No one can describe the extraordinary sense of holiness which was created by his presence. Everyone felt that the fateful hour was approaching, and that Maharaj was taking his final leave of them.

During the early hours of the morning, he remained silent for some time, and fell into a slumber. At seven o'clock he awoke, and was again possessed by this high spiritual mood. He called the few disciples who had just arrived, and had not been present the previous night. To each he gave his blessing, bestowing comfort and fearlessness.

Two more days passed, and another night came on. By this time his life was despaired of, and gloom fell upon all. His physical condition grew worse and worse. The doctors were amazed that Maharaj had not passed into coma days before, as is usual in this kind of illness. But such was the power and spirituality of his mind, so completely was it freed from the meshes of physical matter, that it remained unaffected by the condition of his suffering body. He maintained perfect consciousness right up to the last moment of his life.

As that last evening faded into night, his chest suddenly heaved. It was as if a great wave of breath passed up the body to the throat. His half-closed eyes opened, and fixed their gaze upon the distance, brilliant and unspeakably beautiful.

Thus it was that, on April 10th, 1922, the life left his body.

"Don't grieve. I shall be with you always." Those were his last words to his disciples. After his passing away, we all felt that Maharaj was intensely present within us. He was closer to us than ever before.

More than twenty years have gone by since that day, and every disciple can bear witness that Maharaj still lives, protects and guides him onward towards the goal.

When I was about to leave India and take up my duties in the United States, Swami Shivananda said these memorable parting words: "Never forget that you have seen the Son of God. You have seen God."

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF MAHARAJ

8

I

GOD IS

MAHARAJ

Hold fast to the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Remember Him constantly. Don't waste your time with worldly thoughts. Struggle to control the outgoing mind and fix it on God. Struggle! Struggle hard! Then you will realize what joy there is in spiritual life, what fun it is! You must overcome maya (ignorance) even in this life. It won't be easy unless you devote yourself to the work of the spirit. You must have faith, intense faith. Let no doubt enter your mind.

DISCIPLE

But if doubt creeps in?

MAHARAJ

Doubts will come until you have realized God. When doubts disturb the mind hold fast to God and pray. Think: "God *is*. It's only because of the impurities of my mind that I don't see Him.

But through His grace, I shall gain His vision, when my heart has become pure enough."

This mind cannot know Him. He is beyond this mortal mind and far beyond the human intellect. This apparent universe which you see is within the domain of the mind. The mind is its author, the mind has conjured it up. It cannot go beyond its own domain.

Behind the mind of which we are aware is a subtle, spiritual mind, existing in seed-form. Through contemplation, prayer, and japam[1], this mind develops and with its unfoldment a new vision opens. The aspirant realizes many spiritual truths. However, this is not the final experience. This subtle mind also cannot reach God, the Supreme Atman. But it leads you nearer to him. At this stage the world loses all its charm for the aspirant. He remains absorbed in the consciousness of God.

Next comes samadhi. The experience of samadhi is indescribable—beyond *is* and *is not*. In this blessed experience there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is Infinite Being—inexpressible.

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[1] See Appendix.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how should we perform our worldly duties?

MAHARAJ

Do your duties conscientiously, but always be aware that you are an instrument in the hands of God. There must be no attachment to the work. Know in your heart of hearts that God is the only doer.

Keep your mind forever fixed in Him. Oh yes, you may fail while you are working to keep your mind steady in God. Your ego may creep in. But never be depressed by your failures. Redouble your efforts. Failures are inevitable in the beginning, but keep faith in yourself and never lose courage. Try hard, again and again, to live up to your ideal. Do or die—let that be your motto.

"I must realize God in this very life,"—that must be your watchword. What use is this body or this mind if they don't help you to reach God? Never mind if you have to die in the attempt.

II

THE SUPREME IDEAL IS TO KNOW GOD

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is it true that the gods and goddesses exist? How should I consider ritualistic worship?

MAHARAJ

These many gods and goddesses are only various aspects of one Godhead.

Men incline to different ways of worship. To satisfy the various temperaments, the scriptures describe four distinct methods of reaching God.

One method is ritualistic worship—that is, worshipping God in the image or symbol.

Higher than this is the worship of God with prayer and japam. The aspirant meditates on the shining form of his Chosen Ideal. He prays to Him and makes japam.

Higher still is meditation. That is, a constant flow of thought towards God. When a man follows this way of worship, he remains absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. Here there is neither prayer nor japam. But the sense of duality remains. He *is* and I also *am*.

The highest method, which leads directly and immediately to God, is to meditate on the unity of the Atman with Brahman; to experience Brahman constantly, to know always that He *is*. It is an actual realization of the Omnipresent Reality.

These are the different stages through which the aspirant progresses. A man should begin from where he stands. If, for instance, an ordinary man is told to meditate on the union with the Absolute Brahman, he cannot grasp the truth of it; nor can he follow the instructions. He may make the attempt, but soon he will tire and give it up. However, if the same man is asked to worship God with flowers, perfume, and other accessories he will find that his mind gardually becomes concentrated on God and he will soon experience a joy in his worship. Through ritualistic worship, devotion to the performance of japam grows. The finer the mind becomes, the greater is its capacity for higher forms of worship. Japam inclines the mind toward meditation. Thus the aspirant moves toward his Ideal by a process of natural growth.

Suppose you are standing in the courtyard of a house and you want to reach the roof. Instead of climbing the stairs, you let someone throw you up on to the roof. What will happen? You are sure to get hurt. Just as there are laws that govern the physical world, so there are laws in the spiritual world, also.

DISCIPLE

What should I do if a distracting thought persistently arises in my mind?

MAHARAJ

"This thought is immensely harmful to me. It will be my ruin." Impress this idea again and again upon your mind. The mind will be freed from that distracting thought.

The mind is susceptible to suggestions. It learns whatever you teach it. If through discrimination you can impress upon it the joy and fullness of life in the Spirit and the folly of worldly attachments, then your mind will devote itself more and more to God.

Everyone must have an ideal firmly established in his life. This ideal must never be lowered. The supreme ideal of human life is to know God—God, "who is smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest." He shines forth always and everywhere. He dwells within you, He dwells within me, He dwells within all creatures, and in the plants and herbs as well. He dwells everywhere. The only difference is that in some He is more apparent, while in others, He is more hidden. The one supreme Spirit pervades everything. Make Him your ideal, Him and Him alone. Make a little effort to realize Him and then you will see what fun it all is; what an inexhaustible fount of joy He is. You have seen enough of the world, now see the other side of life, the real side. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." There is only a screen hiding the Reality. Remove it, and you will find Him. Apply yourself to the attainment of this ideal and the whole world will be transformed before your eyes.

DISCIPLE

What rules should be observed about diet?

MAHARAJ

That's a difficult question to answer. Men differ so widely in their constitutions that it is hardly possible to lay down any hard and fast rule about food. One kind of food may be agreeable to your constitution, and do me harm. That's the reason the scriptures do not specifically advise any diet but only warn against rich foods.

DISCIPLE

Should we avoid eating meat, since it entails killing?

MAHARAJ

Nonsense! The Buddhists say, "Harmlessness is the highest virtue." What does this mean? You understand its significance only when you have attained samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures. Until then no amount of talk helps us. When you can see the same God in the ant as in yourself, with no difference at all, only then can you practise this virtue. You may talk of not killing any creature but can you possibly avoid killing? What would you eat? Potatoes? Plant that potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life? Would you eat rice? Plant the paddy grain in the earth. It grows into a rice plant. You want to drink water? Examine a drop of water under a microscope and see how many millions of tiny lives are there. You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures. Do you see any harm in that? Yet you are surely killing. You think you lose your religion if you take a little fish. Such arguments against meat diet are foolish. The ancient Hindus held no such ideas. These are later Buddhist and Vaishnavite interpolations.

III

THE BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

MAHARAJ

Samadhi is generally classified as of two kinds. In savikalpa, the frst sort of samadhi, there is the mystic vision of a spiritual form of God, while the consciousness of individuality still remains. In nirvikalpa, the other type of samadhi, a man loses his individuality and goes beyond the vision of the form of God. The whole universe then disappears. There is yet another kind called Ananda (blissful) samadhi. If an ordinary man reaches this experience, his body and brain cannot bear the supreme ecstatic joy. He does not live more than twenty-one days.

One day, in the course of his teaching, Sri Ramakrishna spoke at length about the manifestation of Brahman as sound—the Logos. I took this as the subject for my noon meditation. As I sat in meditation, suddenly the sound Brahman became revealed to me.

Sri Ramakrishna once said to me: "Once, while I was meditating in the temple, screen after screen of maya (ignorance) was removed from my consciousness. Mother showed me a Light more brilliant than a million suns. From that Light came forth a spiritual Form. Then this Form melted away into the Light itself. The Formless had taken Form and then melted again in the Formless."

The body is the temple of God. Worship and meditation should be practised within it. When the consciousness merges into Sahasrara (the thousand-petalled Lotus in the brain) the mind does not feel inclined to come back. There you realize that what is in the vast universe outside is all within yourself. There is a saying: "If one sees God in the temple, he will not return." The real meaning is that a man attains liberation as he realizes God within the shrine of his own heart. Temples built in the external world are aids for beginners. They are but symbols of the greatest temple of God, the human body.

There is a spiritual eye of wisdom between the two eyebrows. When its vision opens a fountain of joy is released. The whole universe is seen to be merged in bliss.

IV

BE PURE AND FIND PEACE IN GOD

MAHARAJ

There is a king living in a palace with seven gates. A poor man begs the king's minister for an audience, and his request is granted. The minister leads him through the gates to the royal presence. At each gate, stands a richly dressed officer. "Is that the king?" the poor man keeps asking. And the minister answers, "No." However, when they have passed through the seventh gate, and seen the king himself, in his marvellous splendour and beauty, the poor man doesn't have to ask. He knows that this is the king.

It's the same with the Guru. Like the minister, the Guru leads the disciple through different stages until he leaves him with the Lord.

But there is no greater Guru than your own mind. When the mind has been purified through prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties this inner Guru will guide you. It helps you like this until the goal is reached.

The way to steady and purify the mind is to retire into solitude; control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields quantities of milk when it is well fed—so when the mind is offered spiritual food it will yield greater tranquillity. Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation and japam.

Another means of steadying the mind is to let it wander, but keep watch over its workings. After some time the mind gets tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, the mind, in turn will keep watch over you.

Rise early in the morning. The best hours for contemplation are those at which night passes into day and day into night. It is then that the Sushumna (the central spiritual nerve within the spinal column) becomes active, and a man breathes through both nostrils. As a general rule we breathe through only one nostril at a time. This causes restlessness of the mind. Spiritual aspirants should notice when they are breathing through both nostrils. Then the Sushumna is active. Such moments are most helpful to contemplation. Take advantage of them.

Free your minds from cravings and attachments. Practise spiritual disciplines and your minds will become pure and tranquil. Then God will be revealed. Struggle—struggle. If a man does not struggle to realize God, he remains buried in ignorance. Accept these struggles boldly. Welcome them. Through them you will find peace.

The easiest method of realization is to remember Him constantly. Know Him as your very own. Just as a man welcomes his friend, and entertains him with food, drink, and conversation, so you must entertain God in your thoughts, feed Him, offer Him flowers, and converse freely with Him. Then you will find peace in God.

Who can fathom the mystery of God? He is Infinite and Formless. He is also with Form. And He becomes incarnate as man. It is beyond our human power to understand the devious ways through which God leads man to Himself. Sometimes the path is smooth, often it is thorny, or it may be through seemingly impassable mountains.

Still God leads man safely to Himself, if we will only take refuge in Him.

Maya prevents the mind and senses from desiring God-realization. But a man who has realized God has risen above all the charms and attractions which maya has to offer. Maya only reveals her mysteries to him who is beyond maya.

Ordinary men live chained to this maya. They do not even realize how greatly they are suffering, on this wheel of birth and death. Such is the absolute power of maya. The body decays, day by day. Man sleeps in maya, forgetting the sacred mission for which he was born. Human birth has one unique advantage. It is only in this birth that God can be realized. Forget the body and its comforts. Shake off the delusion of birth and death. Shake off the illusory peace of maya and find the real peace—the everlasting peace of God.

V

HOLD FAST TO GOD

MAHARAJ

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a man can attain God if he possesses to an intense degree these three kinds of love—the love a devoted wife bears her husband, the attraction a worldly man feels for the world, and the attachment the miser has for his hoarded gold. Do you know what it means? It means that one can reach the Lord and be blessed with His vision only when the mind is freed from all desires, and longs intensely for God. The Lord says in the Gita—"Give up all the formalities of religion, and take refuge in Me alone."

Surrender yourself whole-heartedly to Him. Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart: "O Lord! I don't know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on You. Grant me everything I need for the spiritual life. Take me along the path that will bring me the greatest good. Give me the faith and strength to remember You and meditate on You constantly."

It is indeed no easy thing to dedicate oneself to the Lord, heart and soul. Many people say: "I have surrendered myself, my all, to God. I am doing what He tells me to do." But if we observe their daily lives, we shall see that their actions are quite contrary to what they profess. If they do anything good, they take the credit to themselves, feel highly elated over it, and think: "Oh, what a great thing I have achieved!" But when even a slight trouble comes to them, they immediately throw the blame on the Lord, saying: "What a great misfortune He is bringing on me!" This is how most people spend their lives.

We judge men only by their exterior, but God looks into their innermost minds. God runs to him who prays with a sincere heart. You may be certain of that. Be pure in heart. Let your mind and your lips be as one. Surrender yourself to His care.

Only one in a million ever sincerely longs for God. And of these only a few sustain that longing. Now that you are blessed with the desire to know Him, try to intensify that desire. When you sit, when you lie down, when you eat or when you work, pray, pray unceasingly: "Lord, make me able to receive and understand that grace which I know You are ready to give me."

How many care to take refuge in God—the only Truth? Man in his folly trusts too much in his intellect. Because he cannot comprehend God he may even deny His very existence. Little does he realize how unstable his intellect is. What he regards as true today seems false to him tomorrow. And yet he thinks that what seems true to him at this moment is the final truth and that everybody must accept it as true.

The Divine Mother alone knows all the subtle ways in which a man may be deluded.

Those who have known Him, never put a limit to His Infinitude. To them, God is not a matter of opinion: He *is*. He is boundless love, beyond the grasp of the intellect. He alone knows, he alone understands, His mysteries, to whom God in His infinite mercy reveals Himself. When a man realizes Him, the gates to infinite knowledge open, attachments break. When a man attains enlightenment, he knows for certain that he belongs to God and God belongs to him.

Yes, the gates of infinite knowledge are opened to the enlightened man. The mysteries of this world and of the next are open books to him.

What we call intelligence is only another name for ignorance. If man wants infinite bliss in this life, if he wants to know who he is, why he was born, and what is the purpose of this life, then let him devote himself to knowing God.

Children in their play swing round a pillar, knowing that if they loosen their grip they will fall and be injured. We also must hold fast to God and know Him to be the Pillar of Life. Hold fast to Him and there will be no danger. Whatever path you follow—the path of knowledge, or of devotion, or of work—you will reach Him. Your life on earth will be blessed and you will be a blessing to mankind.

VI

BE SELF-RELIANT

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I am practising the spiritual disciplines, but as yet I have acquired no taste for them. What must I do?

MAHARAJ

Is it possible to get that taste all at once? No. Struggle hard to attain it. Concentrate all your energies toward its achievement. Never waste them in any other direction. Apply yourself wholeheartedly to it and to nothing else. Onward, onward! Never be satisfied with your growth. Try to create a burning dissatisfaction within yourself. Say to yourself: "What progress am I making? None!" Sri Ramakrishna used to say to God the Mother: "Mother, another day is gone and I have not seen You!"

Every night before you go to bed, think for a while how much time you have spent in doing good deeds and how much in doing useless things, how much time you have spent in meditation and how much you have wasted in idleness. Make your mind strong through the observance of continence and the practice of meditation.

In rich men's houses they keep a porter whose duty is to prevent thieves, cows, sheep, etc., from entering the compound. The mind is man's porter. The stronger the mind becomes, the better. The mind has also been compared to a restive horse. Such a horse is apt to take the rider along the wrong path. Only he who can hold a tight rein and check the horse can go the right way. Struggle on! Do you think that everything is achieved by the mere wearing of the gerrua cloth (ochre-coloured cloth of the Sannyasin) or by renunciation of hearth and home? Have you had any spiritual experience, as yet? Time is flying. Don't waste another moment. You will be able to practise the spiritual disciplines intensively for another three or four years at the most. After that, body and mind will grow weak and infirm and you won't be able to do much. What can be achieved without diligence?

You are thinking: "Let us first of all have yearning, faith and devotion; then we shall start our spiritual practices." Is that possible? Can we see the day before dawn has broken? When the Lord appears, love, devotion and faith follow Him like a retinue.

Can anything be achieved without spiritual discipline? Do you not see what severe disciplines even the Avataras (Incarnations of God) had to perform? Has anybody gained anything without labour? Buddha, Sankara and others —what tremendous austerities they practised in their lives! What burning renunciation they possessed!

Real faith can't be had in the beginning. First realization, then faith. But at first the spiritual aspirant has to pin his faith—"blind faith" it may be—to the precepts of his Guru (spiritual teacher) or of some great soul; only then can he advance toward the goal.

Don't you know the parable of the oyster told by Sri Ramakrishna? The oyster floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open, just for a little drop of the Swati-rain (rain falling when the star Swati or Arcturus is in the ascendant). As soon as it gets a raindrop, it dives down to the ocean-bed and there forms a fine pearl. You have received the raindrop, the grace of your Guru; so dive deep like the oyster into the ocean of Bliss and form the pearl which is the revelation of God.

Be self-reliant. Effort is indispensable to success in spiritual life. Follow some discipline for at least four years. Then, if you don't make any tangible progress, come back and slap my face!

Japam and meditation are impossible unless you transcend rajas (excessive activity) and tamas (inertia or lethargy) and become established in sattva (spiritual tranquillity). Afterwards, you have to rise above sattva, even, and reach the transcendental plane from which there is no return.

How blessed is this human birth! Man alone can find God. To realize Him must be man's only purpose. Strive hard to reach Him and be free in this very life.

The mind is to be raised, step by step, from the gross state to the subtle, then to the causal state, then higher still, to the Great Cause (Mahakarana) and finally to samadhi (highest illumination). Resign yourself utterly to the Lord. He is eveything. There is nothing besides. "Verily all this is Brahman." Everything is His and His alone.

Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day? When that is achieved everything is achieved. One must struggle hard for it. Existence is eternal. The span of man's life is at most a hundred years. Give up the pleasures of these hundred years, if you want to enjoy eternal life and, with it, eternal bliss.

VII

GOD IS BEYOND DUALITY AND NON-DUALITY

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, you spoke to us of the practice of Puja (worship), meditation, continence and study of the scriptures. What does Puja mean?

MAHARAJ

Puja means both external ritualistic worship and mental worship. In ritualistic worship certain accessories are necessary. It is difficult to procure them regularly. So mental worship is more convenient for you. After worshipping the Chosen Ideal mentally with flowers and incense and such other accessories as are offered in ritualistic worship, practise meditation and mental japam. In purely mental japam the mantram (name of the Deity) is to be repeated without even moving the lips. But in ordinary japam one has to utter the mantram silently and therefore there is a movement of the lips.

In meditation you should think that your Chosen Ideal is luminous and that His light is lighting everything. Think of Him as living and conscious. As you continue meditating thus on the form of the Chosen Ideal, the form will gradually melt into the Formless, the Infinite. Then will come a vivid sense of the Living Presence. Finally, the eye of wisdom opens and the Infinite is directly perceived. Ah! That's another realm, beyond the universe! Then this universe appears as nothing. Then the mind is dissolved and you experience savikalpa samadhi. Next comes the realization of nirvikalpa—the absolute union. That experience is beyond thought and speech. Nothing to be seen! Nothing to be heard! Infinite, Infinite alone! This is a direct experience.

When one reaches this state, one can bring the mind down only with great effort to the world of phenomena, which appears to be unreal. It is "beyond duality and non-duality". Some persons who reach this state look upon the body as an obstacle in the way of unbroken spiritual experience, and cast it off in samadhi. It is like the breaking of an earthen jar.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give a beautiful illustration to explain the highest state of spiritual realization. Suppose there are several vessels of water, the sun reflected in each one. You break the vessels one after another until only one is left, with the sun reflected in it; finally even this last one is broken. Then what remains? The sun itself. Similarly, the self-luminous Brahman is reflected in the vessels of the mind, senses, ego, etc. Break one vessel after another; that is, reach beyond the physical consciousness, beyond the subtle body, and the causal body. Then you reach savikalpa samadhi, when you see God. But here also there is a sense of duality—the sense of ego is still present. Break this vessel of an ego and what remains? Brahman and Brahman alone. Who is there then to see whom? Who then can describe whom?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some think of the Chosen Ideal as the all-pervading Spirit. Is this also a form of meditation.

MAHARAJ

Yes, certainly. Everyone should practice this meditation but only after making some progress in spiritual life; not at the beginning. The presence of God must be realized everywhere. He who is personal and with form is also impersonal and without form. He dwells in every being. He pervades land and water, hills and valleys, sky and stars—everything.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the scriptures speak of service to the Guru as a necessary means to spiritual realization. How far is this true?

MAHARAJ

It is necessary at the preliminary stage. But afterwards one's mind itself plays the part of the Guru. The Guru should not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple where the Lord resides. If the Guru is served with this idea in mind, one acquires an intense love for him, which later turns into an intense love for God.

Meditate upon the Guru in the Sahasrara (thousand-petalled lotus in the brain), and then merge the form of the Guru into that of the Chosen Ideal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say very explicitly: "The Guru appears before the disciple in his spiritual vision. He points to the Chosen Ideal and says: 'Look, there is your Chosen Ideal.' Then he becomes merged into that Ideal

Form." There is really no difference between the Guru and God.

There are so many divine truths and experiences. How can I tell you about all of them? Follow the spiritual path in real earnest. The mind will become pure through religious practices and you will understand many truths. Remember, there is no limit to them. Lose yourself in God. Try to meditate in the shrine of the heart. What this shrine is will be revealed to you as you continue the practice.

DISCIPLE

If the aspirant gets a little taste of joy in meditation, he is very much encouraged to proceed on his spiritual path. Isn't that so?

MAHARAJ

True. But in the higher spiritual state there is neither joy nor sorrow, pain nor pleasure, existence nor non-existence. The joy that you speak of is only a help during the period of spiritual practices. The boat needs a favourable wind until it has reached its destination. But when the boat has once arrived, it doesn't matter whether the wind is favourable or contrary. Joy helps the aspirant in his onward course like a favourable wind.

Knowledge, the knower and the object known—these three lose themselves in the Absolute: that is all the scriptures can tell us. What takes place after this, no one is able to describe. It is directly experienced only by one who practises meditation. Only God knows Himself. Be a god, that you may know the Infinite God. In that knowledge there is neither want nor fear. The very thought of such knowledge is uplifting.

To live in God is such fun. Some enlightened souls experience the one undivided Existence. Then they know that the seeming multiplicity of the universe is God's divine play. They know that Infinite God is born as an Avatar for His divine sport. Once when Sri Krishna was dancing in ecstasy, one shepherdess told another, "Friend, the Truth of Vedanta is dancing." Sri Krishna is the supreme Brahman. He is the infinite, changeless Spirit playing at being a man. There is a further spiritual experience which is beyond this, and fathomless.

VIII

PRACTISE DISCIPLINES METHODICALLY

MAHARAJ

How are you getting along with your spiritual practices?

DISCIPLE

Not very well, Maharaj. My mind is restless. I have no taste for them yet. There seems to be an obstacle inside me. I feel so unhappy. I must have been born with evil tendencies and these stand in the way of my spiritual progress.

MAHARAJ

My boy, you should not think like that. Practise japam at dead of night. If you cannot do it then, do it during the early hours of the morning. Perform Purascharana.[1] Do not waste your valuable time any longer. Lose yourself in prayer and meditation. How can the door to spiritual truth be opened unless you are up and doing?

[1] See Appendix.

The spiritual aspirant should not eat much food after sunset. At first take three-quarters of your usual diet. Then reduce the quantity to half. In the beginning you may feel some bodily weakness. But the body will adjust after a time, and will remain active and in perfect condition.

(Maharaj then referred to the days when he practised spiritual disciplines in the company of his brother-disciples and said: "We used to take only one meal during the twenty-four hours.")

MAHARAJ

An aspirant should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul, then follow it methodically. If he does it haphazardly, he cannot make much progress. If he gives it up again, he will have to make twice as much effort to gain the desired result. But, of course, no effort is wasted. Lust, anger, greed, gradually leave a man who practises spiritual disciplines.

Your mind is now covered over by rajas and tamas. It must be made pure and subtle, and raised to the state of sattva. Then you will find joy in spiritual practices and will want to devote more and more time to them. Later on, when the mind attains perfect purity, you will have no other desire but to devote yourself to contemplation always. At present, the mind is gross. Consequently it runs after gross things. But when it becomes pure and subtle, it will run after God—the pure consciousness. When it grows subtle, its power increases and the aspirant is immediately able to grasp the subtle truth of God.

When you sit in meditation, first think of a blissful divine form. This will have a soothing effect upon your nerves. Otherwise meditation will become dry and tedious. Think of the form of your Chosen Ideal, smiling and full of joy.

Waste no more time. Your senses are strong now and must be kept under control. This is a troublesome task, undoubtedly. But practise meditation continuously for seven or eight years, and then you will enjoy the fruits of your practices, peace and bliss. Even in a year's time you will find some result. Many women disciples are making rapid spiritual progress. Shouldn't you strive for it also? But women have greater faith than men. That is why they succeed in a comparatively short time.

Believe, me, the Lord is always with you. If you practise a little, He will extend His helping hand to you. It is He who is protecting us all from miseries and troubles. How unbounded His grace is! How can I describe it to you?

You have merely heard about these spiritual things. Now realize them. You have done enough study and reasoning. Now do some spiritual practice. Take first that aspect of God which most appeals to you. When you feel growing devotion to God in one aspect, and a steadfast love for your Chosen Ideal, you will enjoy loving Him in all His aspects.

One should meditate on the form of the Chosen Ideal while making japam. Otherwise japam isn't effective. If you can't think of the whole form, think of a part only. Begin your meditation on the "Lotus Feet" of the Deity. Even if you fail, struggle on. Why should you stop until you succeed? Success is certain. Practice will make everything easy.

Is meditation an easy affair? Remember, it is next only to samadhi. Try to leave everything to the Lord. Resign yourself entirely to Him. Devotion, self-surrender, and other virtues will grow from within as you practise meditation.

IX

HOW CAN THE KUNDALINI BE AWAKENED?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can the Kundalini[1] be awakened?

MAHARAJ

According to some there are special exercises to awaken it, but I believe it can best be done through japam and meditation. The practice of japam is specially suited to our present age. There is no other spiritual practice easier than this. But meditation must accompany the repetition of the mantram.

DISCIPLE

Does meditation mean thinking of the form of the Deity?

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[1] According to the yogis, there is a store of latent spiritual energy at the base of the spine. This is known as the Kundalini (meaning "coiled-up"), and is pictured as a serpent. When this "serpent-power" is roused it rises up the spinal column and a man's spiritual awakening begins.

MAHARAJ

It is thinking of the Divine, both with form and without form.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is it the Guru who decides whether one should meditate on God with form or without form.

MAHARAJ

Yes. But the pure mind itself becomes the Guru. At times the mind is inclined to think of the divine form. At other times the formless aspect of God appeals to it. The human Guru cannot always be accessible. As the aspirant goes on with his spiritual practices, his power of comprehension also increases. Then his mind can act as a guide.

The Yogavasishtha-Ramayana says that the mind is bound down by its attachment to the body, the senses, and the sense objects. Thus it wastes its energies through various channels. Snap all the bonds! Collect the scattered forces of the mind, and make them flow toward the one Reality. That's what spiritual practice is.

Concentrate the whole mind and direct it toward God until He becomes revealed. Strive.

Be up and doing. You are young now. This is the time to practise spiritual exercises. You won't be able to do so much when you grow older.

Begin your spiritual life in real earnest. If you can gather all the forces of the mind and direct them toward God, God will be revealed. Do it through japam or through meditation or through discrimination. Know that all these means are equally effective. Take any one of them and drown yourself in the ocean of bliss. Don't question any more. First do something; then come and ask questions, if you have any.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, does the Kundalini awaken by the grace of Guru?

MAHARAJ

Through his grace everything can be had, even knowledge of Brahman, to say nothing of the awakening of the Kundalini! But this grace isn't easily obtained. You must work hard.

Practise some spiritual discipline. Begin now. Devote yourself to it exclusively. Don't think about anything else. Plunge into the very depth of your soul.

X

WORK AND WORSHIP

MAHARAJ

How are you progressing in your spiritual practices?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I don't find enough time for them. There's too much work to do.

MAHARAJ

It's a mistake to think that meditation cannot be practised for lack of time. The real cause is the restlessness of your mind.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is very good if one can devote oneself solely to spiritual practices. But how many can do that? Two types of men can sit still without work. One is the idiot, who is too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. As the Gita says, " Without performing work, no one can attain worklessness." Work is a means to reach the state of meditation. Even those who give up work and lead an ascetic life have to spend some of their time on the necessities of living.

Instead of working for yourself, work for the Lord. Know that you are worshipping the Lord through your work. If you can work with this idea, your work will not bind you. On the other hand, it will make you better in every way, physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Offer up your body and soul at the feet of the Lord. Give yourself up entirely to Him, be His servant and tell Him: "I give you my body, soul and all I have. Do with them what You will; I am ready to serve You to the best of my power." If you can do this, the responsibility for your spiritual welfare rests with Him. You needn't bother about it any more. But you should resign yourself in the right spirit. You shouldn't do it with a doubting heart, "taking the name of God to cross the river and at the same time lifting your clothes to keep them dry."[1]

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[1] This reference is to Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milkmaid and the Brahmin priest. A milkmaid used to supply milk to a Brahmin priest living on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service, she could not deliver the milk punctually every day. Once, on being rebuked for her delay, the poor woman said: "What can I do, Sir? I have to wait a long time for the boatman." The priest said: "Woman! people cross the ocean of life by uttering the name of God; can't you cross this little river?" The simple-hearted

After the passing away of our Master, we led a wandering life for five or six years and then set ourselves to work. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) called me aside one day and said: "There is nothing in a wandering life. Work for the sake of the Lord." We did work, and I don't think it did us any harm. Rather, it did us great good. We had strong faith in Swamiji's words. I tell you, you must have infinite faith in these two great souls, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, and work for them.

Work and worship are to be done together. They may seem difficult to harmonize. One has to try again and again. Sri Ramakrishna used to say—"The new-born calf tries to stand up, but falls down many times. It does not stop. It tries again. And finally, it not only stands up, but also learns to run." The mind gets good

woman believed the priest. And from the next day onward she began to cross the river uttering God's name. One day the priest asked her why she was never late as before. The woman replied: 'I cross the river by uttering the name of the Lord as you told me.'' The priest could not believe this; and wanted to see for himself how the woman crossed the river. The woman took him with her and began to walk over the water, repeating the name of the Lord. But looking behind, she saw the priest following timidly, holding up his clothes. ''How is it, Sir,'' she said: ''You are uttering the name of the Lord, but at the same time you are lifting your clothes to keep them dry. You don't really trust Him.''

training if one takes up some regular work at the beginning of the spiritual life. Then the trained mind can be applied to meditation and other spiritual practices. The mind that is allowed to drift will drift at the time of meditation also.

To the spiritually advanced man there comes a time when he wants to devote himself solely to meditation and prayer. At that time work falls away from him of itself. This happens when the mind awakens spiritually. Otherwise, if one takes to a life of exclusive spiritual practice by sheer effort of the will, one can go on only for a few days. Then comes monotony. Some who persist even go mad. Others follow the spiritual path in a haphazard way, and keep their minds busy with worldly things as well.

Great strength can be acquired through the practice of continence. A true celibate can do the work of twenty-five men. With continence, practise japam and meditation; and seek the society of the holy.

All men do not know what is good for them. For that reason one should associate with holy men. Unless a man spends some time in solitude or in the company of the holy, he can't understand his own mind. It is very difficult to grow spiritually in the midst of tumult and confusion.

I give freedom to all. I want everybody to advance along his own line. But when I find a devotee who isn't able to do so, I come to his help.

Eternal life is before you. What would it matter, if you devoted a few lives to the service of God, even supposing they were spent in vain? But I tell you, that cannot be so. You will see to what great spiritual heights you will soar, through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna.

Don't lead an easy-going life any longer. If you do, you won't be able to practise spiritual exercises properly. No matter what work you take up, do it with your whole heart. That's the secret of work, as Swamiji used to say. Set yourself to work, but work for the Lord.

Before you begin to work, remember the Lord and offer your salutations to Him. Do the same from time to time while you are working, and also after you have finished. Spend all your time thinking of the life, teachings and commandments of Sri Ramakrishna. Know in your heart of hearts that all the work you do is for His sake.

Strive to attain tranquillity. Don't give way to inertia but struggle to gain spiritual calmness.

If you allow your mind to wander and yield to a purposeless life, there will be a bad reaction. Passions will overcome you. Through the practice of japam and meditation, the senses become controlled of themselves. But in the beginning you must try to keep them in check.

Practise japam and meditation. Gradually after continued practice you will enjoy sitting for long hours absorbed in God. The beginner, however, is advised to sit in meditation for short periods only, four or five times a day. Whether you like it or not, practise japam. As you persist, the mind is certain to become absorbed in contemplation. To attain this spiritual tranquillity you must continue your regular practice—even against your inclinations. Spiritual awakening will come. And when it comes, you won't even remember that passions ever existed in you.

XI

DEVOTE YOUR MIND TO GOD: GREAT WILL BE YOUR JOY

MAHARAJ

Do you know why I insist that you devote yourselves heart and soul to the Lord? When we were of your age, Sri Ramakrishna kept careful watch over our spiritual practices. In youth the mind is plastic like clay and can be moulded into any shape. Your minds are still pure and untainted—not yet baked in the fire of worldliness. They can be directed very easily towards God, and you won't be troubled by distractions. If the mind is now firmly moulded into the shape of the Divine you will achieve your purpose.

The mind is like a package of mustard seeds. If the seeds are once scattered, it is very difficult to collect them. As you grow older and the energies of the mind have been scattered in worldly thoughts, it will be very difficult to collect them and turn the mind toward God.

Make God the be-all and end-all of your existence. Devote yourselves sincerely to realizing Him, and you will be free from all sorrow and pain. You will inherit everlasting bliss and divine joy.

Man looks for happiness in the world. But does he find it? He toils hard, runs after many objects, always hoping to find happiness, but only catching shadows. Thus his whole life ebbs away. He lives and dies in vain. To realize true happiness, leave the fleeting, worldly pleasures behind. Give your whole mind to God. Devote your mind to God, and your joy will be great. Devote your mind to the world and the pleasures of the world, and great will be your suffering.

You are boys—very young boys. Your minds have not yet received any evil impressions from the outside world. If you can struggle hard from now on, you will be able to escape life's sorrows and miseries.

Never forget the ideal of human life. This life is not given us to while away in eating, drinking and sleeping like animals. Since you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments. Firmly resolve to realize God and attain infinite bliss. Don't waver, even if you die in the attempt. Isn't it wiser to enjoy the present life in an ecstasy of devotion and spiritual practice and then enter the doors of infinite bliss forever?

To obtain God's grace is the most important aim in spiritual life. The breeze of His grace is always blowing. Just unfurl your sails. Give up worldly enjoyments, and completely resign yourself to the Lord. You can't love both God and the world at the same time. If you want God, avoid temporal pleasures. Decide now what you want. Is it this fleeting life of transient pleasures or the everlasting life of eternal bliss?

When a man regards God as his very own and has renounced all worldly cravings for His sake, God is very near to him. Such a man binds God with the fetters of his love.

Think of Him as your own, and like a child speaking to its mother, ask Him: "Lord, reveal Yourself to me." When a devotee is in earnest, God can't remain unmoved. He hurries to him and takes him on His lap. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy! How boundless is that bliss! He alone knows it who has had that supreme experience. Compared to it, worldly pleasures, so dear to most people, seem insipid and worthless.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "He who has given up sense-enjoyments for God's sake has already covered three-quarters of his journey." Is it easy to renounce bodily cravings? Only if a man has God's grace and has practised severe spiritual disciplines in his past lives, can he possess the strength to renounce, in this life. Purify your mind so that no worldly desire can arise in it at all.

You have renounced everything and pledged your life to God. But remember, it's very hard to lead a pure and unsullied life. It's not so easy as you young boys think. Do you know what it is like? It is like walking on the edge of a drawn sword. Every moment there is the chance of a fall, of being sliced in pieces. Perfect continence is the sole condition of success in spiritual life. And it is difficult, no, it is impossible, to practise absolute purity without love for and faith in God. You have to live in a world full of passions and pleasures. Every day you have to see before you more than ninety-nine per cent of the people running mad after sensual pleasures; there is constant risk of your mind being contaminated. Those who want to lead a life of renunciation must always engage their minds in thinking good thoughts, studying good books and discussing elevating subjects. They must spend their time in worship of God, service to holy men, and in contemplation. This is the only way to mould one's character.

First of all, be firm in your vow of chastity. Everything else will follow. You can't live a continent life unless you devote yourself to God, and without continence realization of God is impossible. Unless God is realized, real happiness cannot be had; and without real happiness, human life will be spent in vain. I beg you, my dear children, make some effort and you will see how faith and devotion will be awakened in you.

You will become heirs of immortal bliss; you will be blessed with the vision of God.

XII

REMEMBER HIM CONSTANTLY

MAHARAJ

The mind rules the senses. Therefore it must be controlled. Next, both mind and the intellect must be merged in the Atman. While you are in the society of holy men, your passions remain apparently dead, but they exist in a latent form. They are only wiped out completely after samadhi has been attained. Always be on your guard until you have transcended the mind.

"God is." "Religion is true." These truths are not preached merely to make men moral or to keep society in order. Truly He is, He is the reality and He can be realized. There is no other truth greater than this. Don't be fanatics. You must be calm, tranquil and controlled.

Meditate four times regularly each day; early in the morning, at midday, at sunset and at midnight. Be steadfast in your ideal, keep up the regularity of your practice under all conditions. Study a chapter of the Gita every day. If the mind is crowded with unnecessary thoughts and worries, it can be cleaned out by reading the Gita. I know this from my own experience.

Devote some of your time every day to self-analysis. Ask yourself: "Why have I come here? How am I passing my time? Do I really want God? Am I really struggling to find Him?" A man's mind tries to deceive him. He must not let himself be swayed by his mind: he must curb and rule it. Hold on to the truth. Be pure-hearted. The purer you become the more your mind will be absorbed in God. The subtle deceptions of the mind will become apparent to you and you will be able to destroy them completely. Who are your enemies? Your own senses. But if you control them they will become your friends. This mind is your enemy and it is also your friend. The man who analyses himself can wipe out the subtle deceptions of the mind; then you will move forward rapidly along the path of spirituality.

Plunge yourself deeply into the practice of japam and meditation. The mind is gross and feeds on gross objects. But as japam and meditation are practised, the mind becomes subtle and learns to grasp subtle truths. Practise.

Practise. See for yourself if there is really a God. A little practice of physical austerity is sometimes good. For instance, on the day of the new-moon, or on the eleventh day after the new or the full moon, eat only once. Never waste your time in unnecessary talk. Constantly remember Him. Remember Him when you eat, when you sit or when you lie down. If you practise in this way, you will find that when you sit down to meditate your mind will naturally become absorbed in God. As your mind becomes absorbed in its meditation, a fountain of joy will spring forth from within.

Give no time to worries or idle talk. Idle talk wastes much energy. In the Upanishads we read: "Give up all vain talk." Devote your time entirely to meditation upon the Atman. In the Gita it is said: "Give your mind to Me, be My devotee, worship Me and bow down to Me." Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Never squander the energy of your mind." This means you must remember Him constantly. The worldly man is very careful not to squander his money. But he does not realize how he is squandering his mind. There is nothing greater or easier than constantly to remember God. Such a practice awakens the

Kundalini. The veils of maya will be removed one after another, and a new vision will open. Then you will see what a wonderful treasure there is within you. You will unfold your own Divinity.

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna. He still lives. Pray to Him sincerely and He will show you the path. "You are mine and I am yours." Merge yourself in His consciousness.

As a general rule, a man's mind runs downward like a river—toward lust and gold, name and fame. Turn the current of the mind. Make it flow unceasingly upward, toward God. The mind of Sri Ramakrishna lived always in the transcendental plane. Only with much struggle could he bring his mind down to normal consciousness and to the things of the world.

Japam. Japam. Japam. While you work, practise japam. Let the wheel of the name of God go round and round in the midst of all activities. Do this! All the burning of the heart will be soothed. Don't you know how many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God? Have intense faith in God and in His name. Know that God and His name are one. He dwells in the hearts of His devotees. Call on Him earnestly. Pray to Him: "Reveal Your grace to me. Give me faith and devotion." Pray earnestly. Make your mind and your lips one.

Cover everything with God. See Him in all creatures. As you learn to see God everywhere, you will become "humbler than a blade of grass." Hear only of God and talk only of Him. Shun that place where His name is not uttered as you would a cremation-ground.

Repeat His name and call on Him. He is very near and dear to all. Why should He not reveal Himself? Open your heart to Him. He will guide you along the right path. There is nothing more purifying than His name and meditation upon Him. He is our very own. He easily becomes revealed to us.

There is the path of devotion and there is the path of knowledge. A devotee wants the form of God. He calls on Him, he sings His praise, he chants His name and he sees His shining form. Sometimes he weeps and sometimes he laughs. The followers of the path of knowledge seek for the Light. They become illumined. However, in the end, the devotee and the man of knowledge become one. Ignorance is destroyed by following the path of devotion as well as by following the path of knowledge. The light of knowledge alone shines. What lies beyond the light of knowledge? He alone knows who goes beyond, no one else. And nobody can reveal that.

Have patience, infinite patience, until you reach the Reality. In the primary stage, meditation is tiresome—it is like learning the alphabet. Gradually, peace overflows within you. There are boys who complain to me after they have been initiated that they are not getting anywhere. I do not listen to them for two or three years. Then later they come and tell me: "Yes, Maharaj, I am getting somewhere now." Do not be impatient. Struggle intensely for two or three years, and your heart will be flooded with joy.

XIII

BE LOST IN GOD

DISCIPLE

But Maharaj, do you mean that Sri Ramakrishna is still living?

MAHARAJ

Are you crazy? If he were not alive, why should we lead such a life, giving up our homes and all our possessions? He *is*. Pour out your whole heart in prayer to Him. Ask to see and to know Him. He will take away all your doubts and will show you His true nature.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, do you see Him?

MAHARAJ

Yes, through His grace, I see Him. Anybody can see Him if His grace is upon him. But how many love Him? How many yearn to see Him?

It is not an easy matter to realize God. Without a harmonious development of the mental, physical and spiritual powers, religion is not possible.

Faith, intense faith! He who has acquired faith has seen God.

If you have faith, a penny has great value; if you have no faith, a gold piece is worth nothing. He who has no faith in God, doubts everything. He who has faith in God overcomes all his doubts.

Without dispassion toward the world, faith and love do not grow. You must have dispassion. To lose the ego in God is dispassion.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, when I sit down to meditate, I find my mind wandering; it thinks of endless things. How is it possible to stop this restlessness?

MAHARAJ

In the beginning this always happens, but you must try diligently to check the mad outward rush of your mind. This is how to do it successfully: never begin your meditation immediately after sitting down. First draw the mind back from its external pursuits by means of discrimination and lock it up inside at the sacred feet of the Chosen Ideal; then make japam and meditate. If you follow this course for some time, the mind will naturally cease to wander.

The path of japam is the easiest way. By constantly performing japam the mind can easily be made calm and steady, and finally it will lose itself in God. Therefore I ask you to make japam regularly and often; at the same time meditate on the Chosen Ideal. Perform both japam and meditation simultaneously. This combination brings success more quickly.

Always practise your disciplines with unswerving steadfastness and don't let a single day pass by without them. Whether you like it or not, sit down at the appointed hour every day. If you can carry on your practices for three years with such unerring regularity, I assure you that love for God will grow in you and you will feel yourself nearer to Him. Then you will be prompted from within to call upon Him and Him only: you won't be able to turn your mind in any other direction. It is at this stage that the aspirant feels the joy of spiritual life within his heart.

Without intense love for God, it is very difficult to practise spiritual disciplines in the right way, even after retiring into solitude. When you are alone, there is always a possibility of serious consequences. Therefore, two of a similar type and temperament should live together; in that case mutual help and guidance may be given should any spiritual crisis befall one or the other at any time. But, on the other hand, if there are more than two, confusion may arise. They may indulge in worldly talk. Such idle talk not only causes the mind to lose its higher tendencies and nobler aspirations, but makes it forget God.

While you are undergoing intense disciplines you must cut down the quantity of your food to a minimum. On a full stomach japam and meditation are not possible because the greater part of your energy will be squandered in digesting the food, and the mind will remain disturbed. That is why moderation in habits, in food and recreation, in everything, has been so strongly enjoined by the Gita. "Yoga is not for the man who overeats," the Lord says, "or for him who fasts excessively. It is not for him who sleeps *too* much, or for the keeper of exaggerated vigils."

In this sacred monastery, how great are the facilities for spiritual practices ! You don't have to worry about food, or clothes, or anything else. All is ready at hand. Live here and apply yourself whole-heartedly to a life of constant prayer and meditation. No good comes of living like a vagabond, my child.

If you think that you can become a mahatma or a great seer by wandering here and there, let me tell you, you are misguided. You cannot become a saint in that way. Without unceasing practice you cannot have any religious experience; it can't be got simply by trickery. If you sincerely long for God, you must plunge into meditation and become completely lost in God.

XIV

GOD CAN BE SEEN

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can one control the mind?

MAHARAJ

Through gradual practice, the mind has to be concentrated upon God. Keep a sharp eye on the mind so that no undesirable thoughts or distractions may enter in. Whenever they try to crowd into your mind, turn it toward God and pray earnestly. Through such practice the mind comes under control and becomes purified.

When you feel and know that you are helpless, that you have no other refuge but God, when you feel you have nothing to look forward to, then only does devotion to God arise.

Practise japam incessantly. With every breath, practise it. Through practice, japam will become your second nature. You will then find that you are chanting the name of God before you fall asleep and you will find yourself chanting His name as you awake.

Know for certain that God can be reached—that His spiritual form can be seen and it is possible to talk to Him.

Practise these spiritual disciplines. As you practise them new visions will open. You will see wonderfully beautiful visions. You may see the many aspects of God, and many spiritual forms. Or you may see the ocean of Light or a steady flame. There is no end to God-unfoldment—the knowledge of the Infinite Existence, Infinite Bliss. Light, Light, more Light! Engage yourself in these practices. With great earnestness chant His name and dive deep.

Learn to acquire love and sympathy for all. Overlook the faults of others. If you can't help an evil man to become good then what use is your spiritual life?

Learn patience. Anger is controlled through patience. Be patient, forbearing and humble. Humility is a great aid in building our character. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who can forbear, lives. He who cannot, is lost." Again he would say, "Water accumulates on low ground. When the ground is high, it flows off it." When a man is humble, sweetness of character and other good qualities develop naturally.

Try to remember God constantly—even while you are working. In the beginning it is a little difficult but through practice it becomes easy. Don't stop struggling. It is no use having too many rules and regulations for spiritual practices. The main thing is sincerity and earnestness. If these qualities are in your prayer it will surely reach Him. God looks into the heart and not into the words of man.

People talk of enjoying this world, but do they know how to enjoy it? First become a god and then enjoy. Before that, all your enjoyments are the enjoyments of a brute.

If your mind has become pure and you live with pure thoughts, no evil can touch you.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, there is the song, "I want to taste sugar but not to become sugar." Should that be the attitude of a devotee?

MAHARAJ

"I want to taste sugar but not become sugar," is for the man who has not yet tasted sugar. When a devotee begins to taste the sweetness of God, he will desire to achieve oneness with Him.

DISCIPLE

Are dreams about enlightened men or Divine Incarnations real?

MAHARAJ

Yes, they are real. Dreams about enlightened souls, gods and goddesses and Divine Incarnations are real experiences. They are actual visitations. Many spiritual truths are revealed to one in dreams. The effect and impression of such dreams remain. But one mustn't speak of them to anybody.

XV

LIVE FOR THE GOOD OF THE WORLD

MAHARAJ

To do good to the world you must be perfectly selfless. Worldly people are such that often if you do them good they in return will try to harm you. You have heard of the great soul Vidyasagar. He lived for the good of the world and those who were benefited by him were the very ones who spoke ill of him and tried to do him harm. If he learned that someone had spoken ill of him, he would say, "Have I done him any good that he does me this harm?" That is the nature of the world. But the truth of the matter is that those who are good will do good by their very nature and those who are wicked will do harm by their very nature.

Once a holy man was meditating, seated on the bank of a river. Suddenly he saw a scorpion floating on the water. He took pity on it and with the palm of his hand helped it out of the water. But as he did so the scorpion stung him. The holy man suffered great pain. A few moments later the scorpion again fell into the water. The holy man again helped it out. Again the scorpion stung him. This happened a third time. A man, who was watching the holy man helping the scorpion, asked, "Why do you help the scorpion when it stings you again and again?" The holy man replied, "It is the nature of the scorpion to sting and it is my nature to do good. The scorpion does not give up its nature, why should I give up mine?"

Mind moves upward or downward. Jealousy, selfishness, desire for enjoyment, laziness, etc., are its movement downward. Faith, devotion to God, love, sympathy, etc., are its movement upward.

XVI

KNOW HIS GRACE

MAHARAJ

Practise japam and your body and mind will become pure. Have intense faith in the power of God's name and meditate on Him. If you chant His name, your bonds are broken and you become fearless. You will find immortality.

To obtain His grace, to know Him—that is the one object of spiritual disciplines. There is the mud of 'lust and gold' in the mind—that mud must be washed away. Unless the heart is purified, God's grace does not reveal itself.

Sri Ramakrishna used to give a beautiful illustration: So long as the needle is covered with mud it is not attracted by the magnet. But when the mud is washed off, the needle is naturally drawn towards the magnet. The mud of the mind is washed away if one thinks of the Lord and meditates on Him. At once the magnet of God attracts the needle of man's mind to Him. The moment the mind becomes pure, divine grace begins to flow. This divine grace reveals God.

Can man know God by himself? Can the intellect grasp Him? Surrender yourself to Him. Seek refuge in Him. Love Him. Yearn for Him. Be mad for Him.

To know Him is the one purpose of life. Learn to be absorbed in Him. Activity is not the goal. Work without attachment is only a means to absorption in God. Meditate and dive deep. As you dive deep you will know that God alone is real, everything else is unreal. Never stop but move onward. When a little spiritual awakening comes through your practices, do not mistake that for the goal. Light! more light! Go deep and deeper. You must know Him directly, face to face, and talk to Him.

Enough of study and arguments! Now gather the forces of your mind and direct them toward Him and Him only. Plunge into the Ocean of Bliss.

Do not miss eternal joy for the sake of ephemeral pleasures. Worldly pleasures will seem insipid when once you taste the divine bliss.

Before your eyes you see many attractive sense-objects; but where will they be when your eyes close for the last time? These objects of enjoyment lead a man from darkness to greater darkness. Which path will you take? The path that leads to darkness, or the path that leads to light?

Ah, my children, you have glimpsed that path of light. Don't turn back to the path of darkness. Sense-attraction is strong indeed. If you yield to it, it creates indelible impressions of evil in the mind and the mind will drag you down and down, without your being aware of it. The only way to remain safe from sense-objects is to give yourselves up whole-heartedly to God. Be strong in His strength and this very strength will free you from the net of maya. Only he alone who has known God's grace can overcome this world.

XVII

WIN THE GRACE OF YOUR OWN MIND

MAHARAJ

To give ourselves wholly to God is difficult because of this doubt which arises in the mind: " Since I have not known or seen God, how can I love Him? How can I surrender myself to Him?"

This doubt, however, is removed if a man finds the grace of an illumined Guru. The Guru removes all obstacles and shows the path to the Eternal.

Have intense faith in the words of the Guru and follow his precepts. The impurities of the mind will be washed away and the light of knowledge will dawn.

If a man longs for God, if he is earnest about practising spiritual disciplines, he is sure to find a Guru.

The man who has the grace of a Guru knows the path. Let him follow it diligently.

The Vaishnavas have a beautiful saying: "A man may have the grace of the Guru, the grace of God, and of His devotees; but without the grace of his own mind, he comes to ruin."

My boys, you have the grace of the Guru; you have, by the grace of God, the desire for spiritual knowledge, you have the society of the holy. Now you must strive to win the grace of your own minds, by the practice of self-control.

"God is my very own." Have this truth firmly fixed in your hearts. Then everything will be easy.

Give this life entirely to Him. Reserve no will of your own. He is the only refuge.

The same instructions for spiritual disciplines do not apply to everyone. The Guru studies the temperaments and tendencies of each individual and instructs him accordingly.

Beyond a few general rules, no individual can be told in the presence of another what particular path he should follow. I have seen in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, my Master, how he would take each disciple alone and give him, in private, the special instructions necessary for him. If you want to ask your Guru anything regarding your spiritual practices, you must do so in private.

I will give you a few instructions which can be followed by all.

First, have faith in God. Be firmly convinced that to realize Him is the only purpose of life. By knowing Him alone a man reaches eternal life and infinite happiness.

Next, practise continence. Without perfect chastity, no one can hold fast to high spiritual ideals. To nourish the body, mind and brain and to secure their fullest development, continence is essential. A special spiritual nerve develops in a chaste man. With its aid, his memory, his capacity for spiritual understanding and his faith in God increase. He is able to experience spiritual truths which lie beyond the reach of the senses. That is the reason religious teachers stress the ideal of chastity.

Thirdly, control your appetite. Take nourishing food which is easily digested. Avoid food that excites or produces lethargy. The brain must be kept cool, in order that you may meditate. Eat to keep the body healthy. Health is essential in the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Eat very little after sunset. Then you can meditate during the night. Daytime has many distractions. At night, nature takes on a quiet aspect and so the night-time is best suited for practising contemplation. At dead of night, with a little effort, the mind becomes absorbed in God.

Do not make a show of your spiritual practices. When you meditate, meditate in secret.

The most suitable hours for prayer and contemplation are those at the junction of day and night, and at midnight.

Sri Ramakrishna never spent the night in sleep, nor would he allow his young disciples to sleep long. When others had gone to bed, he would awaken them; give them definite instructions and send them to the Panchavati, or the Mother's Temple, or Shiva's Temple for meditation. They would spend the whole night in prayer as directed, and rest during the day. It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna used to take them through various spiritual exercises. Often he used to say: "Three classes of people keep awake in the night: yogis, bhogis (seekers of enjoyment) and rogis (sick persons). You are all yogis. You should never sleep away the night."

You are young. Strive hard to taste the Divine Bliss. When once you have enjoyed happiness in God, where else can you go but to Him?

XVIII

KEEP THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY

MAHARAJ

The moment you become absorbed in contemplation, you experience unbounded joy. Days and nights pass away in the blissful consciousness of God.

Be careful not to speak of your spiritual moods and experiences to everybody, least of all to those of a worldly nature. It may hinder your growth. However, if you exchange your experiences with one of a like mind, whose temperament is in harmony with your own, you may be helped in your progress. Both of you are travellers on the same path. Perhaps your companion has already walked along it and is aware of its pitfalls. Benefited by his experiences, you may be able to avoid those dangers and difficulties.

Do you know why you should seek the society of holy men? Their experiences are a great help to a spiritual aspirant. When you visit a new place, if you have the help of a good guide, you will be able to see within a short time all that is worth seeing there; also you will be saved from the dangers and difficulties into which strangers are likely to fall. Similarly, from the company of advanced spiritual souls you will gather many valuable hints, and your struggle will be simplified.

This life may come to an end any moment. Nobody knows when. Be equipped for the journey with spiritual treasures. To go empty-handed to an unknown place involves much suffering and sorrow. Birth is inevitably followed by death. Death means going to an unknown place, so you must prepare yourself for the journey. Always be ready for the great call.

Here you have every opportunity to grow spiritually. Struggle now to reach Reality. Hold on to the Pillar. Have tremendous faith in yourself. "I can know God"—with such faith forge ahead and you will reach Him. Then life will be blessed. Free yourself from the wheel of birth and death. Be His eternal companion.

Banish all fear and weakness. Never weaken your mind by thinking of past mistakes. Sin? Sin only exists in man's eye. In God's eye there is none. One glance from Him and the sins of many, many births are wiped away.

You have come to Sri Ramakrishna. Hold on to him. You will have nothing to worry about.

You must have a regular routine for spiritual practices. You must have certain fixed hours for meditation and study. Under all circumstances follow this routine devotedly. Steadfastness is very important; without it no success is possible.

By steadfastness alone the mind becomes absorbed in God. Unless absorption is achieved, freedom from the temptations of the world is impossible. Lust, anger, delusion—these are strong foes. Be strong in the strength of God and escape from the net of maya.

You must follow your routine. The mind may rebel at first. Don't yield to it like a slave. Gradually you will find yourselves masters of your own minds. When you have gained control over yourselves and your minds have become naturally absorbed in God, then you need follow no rules or routines.

Life is flowing quickly away, like a stream. The day that is once gone can never be recalled. Make the best use of your time. At the last moment, it will be no good crying, "Alas, alas!"

XIX

KEEP YOUR MIND IN GOD

MAHARAJ

Keep your mind always in communion with God; then all depravity of mind will vanish. Select a room for daily worship; retire there every morning and evening. Perform japam and meditation and prayer regularly for as long as you can. The more you can devote yourself to the contemplation of God, the more fruitful your life will become; the more attached you are to the vanities of the world, the less peace you will feel in your mind. I pray to the Almighty that by His endless grace He may lead you in the right path!

Know this: without worshipping God you can never have peace of mind. Therefore spend some time every day in the worship of God, in japam and meditation, and in singing His glory. True devotion, faith, and knowledge are the results of long persistence in spiritual practices. Many people turn to agnosticism when, after a lukewarm attempt at spiritual practices, they cannot realize

God or attain to the bliss Divine. The reason is not far to seek. These people don't possess sincere attachment to God, so they find it difficult to persevere in the path of spiritual practices. The disciplines prove too arduous an undertaking for them.

Without Divine attachment and Divine love the mind becomes dry and restless. But the more you suffer for God's sake the more peaceful will you become at last. " Persist cheerfully in your attempt," said Sri Ramakrishna, " then you will succeed against all odds." So plunge headlong into spiritual disciplines and persevere in them; don't shirk, even at the risk of your life.

It is hard indeed to kindle any thought of God within the human heart without the fire of renunciation. I am certain that the more a man possesses this fire within himself, the greater is the peace he enjoys. We saw a true and living representation of discrimination and renunciation in Sri Ramakrishna, the Master. With the progress of time we know him more and more. We read of discrimination and renunciation in the scriptures, but we saw them personified in him.

You mustn't divulge the secret of your spiritual practices to everybody.

There is nothing real outside, everything real is within.

God should be imagined as vast and infinite. To gain an idea of the vastness within, one should look at the Himalayas or the ocean, or gaze at the sky.

True character cannot be formed unless a man becomes God-fearing, that is, unless he believes in God, in the life hereafter, and in such principles.

To conquer lust or control the mind by studying books is as impossible as walking on air.

So long as Mother Kundalini moves in a downward direction, the mind of man runs after things relating to the phallus, the anus and the navel. But as She rises up, the mind also rises; it then moves toward things spiritual.

With the growth of tranquillity, a man becomes eager to behold the vision of God; he then delights in singing His glory and meditating upon Him more and more.

Like the Buddha one should be bold. Look, what a mighty renunciation he made! To realize God he gave up all his royal comforts without a thought. What a severe course of discipline he underwent! When, in spite of everything, he could not realize God, he took his bath in the sacred

Nirajana (a rivulet at Buddha Gaya), and sat down for the last time with this resolve: "Let this body go; but until I have attained illumination, I will not rise." And the illumination came!

XX

TAKE YOUR REFUGE IN GOD

MAHARAJ

God is the wish-yielding tree. Whatever a man asks of Him, that he receives. But such is the play of maya that man does not want to find the blissful ocean of God; instead he drowns himself in the quagmire of worldliness, and thinks he is happy. Then as he meets with the sufferings of the world he feels that his life has been lived in vain. You are sitting under this wish-yielding tree. Ask to become divine and you will become divine. Ask to become a brute and a brute you will become.

In the domain of maya there is both vidya (that which leads a man to God) and avidya (which leads a man away from God). Vidya is spiritual discrimination and renunciation of worldliness. By taking refuge in vidya, you take refuge in God. While avidya, which consists of lust, anger, greed, egotism, attachment and envy, lowers a man to the level of a brute. If you cultivate discrimination and renunciation, avidya will be destroyed. If you yield to avidya, God remains far away and suffering will be your lot. There is both vidya and avidya. Man has the power to choose the one or the other, and he will reap the fruits of life accordingly. Why blame God for your sufferings? Man falls in love with the pleasures of the moment, never stopping to discriminate, the suffering which follows is of his own making. If you put your hand into the fire it will get burned. Is that the fault of the fire? Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "It is the nature of the lamp to shed light. Some may read the Bhagavatam (sacred scriptures) by its light, while others may forge a document. The lamp is not to blame."

My Master used to say, "There is a peculiar breeze, known as malaya. When it blows it transforms the trees, which have the right substance in them, into sandal trees; but the worthless trees remain as they are, although the breeze touches them, too." So also there are two classes of men. The one class of men, as soon as they come into the presence of the holy, and hear their teachings, are awakened. They see the evanescence of the world and become eager to find God, and to solve the the mysteries of life and death. They at once devote themselves to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Such men are sure to succeed in reaching enlightenment.

There is another class. You may hold high spiritual ideals before them but they do not respond. They imagine that they will live forever in this world, and that the world cannot get along without them. They also think it is sheer foolishness to give up the pleasures of the world for the sake of the unknown. Thus they remain in the well of darkness.

Earnestly pray to God with all your heart and soul, "O Lord, give me understanding. Free me from all sense of ego. Teach me to submit to Your will. Make me Your own."

Yearn for Him. Since you have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, be certain that you have his grace. Luckless is he who has received this grace, but fails to recognize it. Do not miss the supreme joy. Be his eternal companion.

Sri Ramakrishna, the avatar of this age, is helping every sincere, earnest aspirant. He is waiting for you. Make a little effort and spread the sails of faith and devotion. The spiritual breeze that is blowing will take you to the goal. Do not look back. Go ahead. Let your life be blessed by His vision.

XXI

SEEK GOD ONLY

No one wants misery. Every one wants happiness. Yet the deluded man ignores God, the source of all happiness, and runs after worthless objects, the toys of life. If you want happiness throw away these toys and yearn for Him. He will run to take you on His lap. Seek the toys of life, and you will get them. Seek God, and you will get Him.

"Eat the mangoes, do not count the leaves." Life's purpose is to reach God. Reach Him first. Solve the mystery of life and death. Wake up and plunge into the ocean of nectar and be immortals. Pray to Him unceasingly.

God has many names and many forms. He is also formless. Worship Him. Lose yourself in His contemplation. It makes no difference by what name or in what form you worship Him. If you are sincere in your worship you will be blessed with His vision. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Sweetened bread will taste sweet in whatever way you eat it."

Have faith and plunge into the fathomless ocean. Dive deep and you are sure to find the Eternal treasure. Don't lose heart if after a little struggle, you fail to realize God. The ocean is full of precious pearls, but you may not find them at the first dive. Try patiently to dive deep into meditation. In due course you are certain to receive His grace. Suppose you wish to see an important man. You arrange the interview with the help of his attendants. Similarly, to obtain the Lord's grace, you must seek the help of godly men and undergo many spiritual disciplines.

Knowing Him to be dearer than the dearest, pray to Him with a yearning heart for His grace and vision. Cry to Him like a child. He cannot stay away from you for long.

Make the mind one-pointed like the mariner's compass. In whatever direction the ship may sail, the compass always points to the north, and keeps the ship on its course. Keep your mind pointed towards God and life's boat will sail smoothly. A man who does this never loses his faith and devotion even if he is thrown into an evil environment. The moment he hears of God, he becomes intoxicated with joy. A piece of flint may lie under water for a thousand years, but it will still emit sparks if it is taken out and struck.

Like a fallen leaf tossed to and fro by the wind, the one-pointed man is content to remain wherever the Lord places him. He has no will or desire of his own. He can live in the world and at the same time dive into the ocean of knowledge and bliss.

A pure mind is like a dry match-stick. It ignites the moment you strike it. But if it gets wet, though you may go on striking it, there will be no light. Similarly if the mind becomes soiled by worldliness, you will find it extremely difficult to restore it to its former purity.

XXII

THE REAL AUSTERITY IS THE CONTROL OF PASSIONS

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, my mind is still restless. How can I curb it?

MAHARAJ

Practise japam and meditation regularly. Don't fail even for one day. The mind is like a spoiled child—always restless. Try to steady it again and again, by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in Him. If you continue your practice for two or three years, you will begin to feel an unspeakable joy and the mind will become steady. In the beginning the practice of japam and meditation seems dry. It's like taking bitter medicine. You must forcibly pour the thought of God into your mind. As you persist you will be flooded with joy. What a terrible ordeal a student undergoes to pass his examination! Do you know that to realize God is far easier? Call on Him sincerely with a tranquil heart.

DISCIPLE

That is encouraging, Maharaj. But at times I feel that with all my struggle I am making no progress. It all seems unreal. Despair takes hold of me.

MAHARAJ

No, no. There is no cause for despair. The effect of meditation is inevitable. You are bound to get results if you practise japam with devotion, or even without it. For devotion will follow. Continue your practice regularly for a little longer. You will find peace. One's health also is improved if one meditates.

Meditation, in the primary stage is like waging a war with the mind. With effort the restless mind has to be brought under control and placed at the feet of the Lord. But in the beginning, take care that while you meditate, you do not overtax your brain. Go slowly. Gradually intensify your effort. Through regular practice, when the mind becomes steady, meditation will be easier. You will not feel any strain in sitting for long hours in contemplation.

Just as after a deep sleep, a man feels refreshed in body and mind, so will you feel refreshed after meditation and there will follow an intense experience of happiness.

Body and mind are closely related. When the body is disturbed, the mind also becomes disturbed. Therefore particular care must be given to diet in order to keep the body healthy.

Under no circumstances should an aspirant fill more than one-half of his stomach with food.

Meditation is not such an easy matter. When you have eaten too much, the mind becomes restless. Also unless you keep lust, anger, greed, and such other passions under control, the mind will remain unsteady. How can you meditate with an unsteady mind?

You must practise severe austerities. Not physical austerities or the torture of the body! Such are easy to practise. The real austerity is the control of passions. Never allow any passion to lift its head. But remember, religion is not for the eunuch, nor for the man who maims his body to avoid passions.

Unless you meditate, the mind cannot be controlled, and unless the mind is controlled, you cannot meditate. But if you think, "First let me control the mind and then I shall meditate," you will never enter the path of spiritual life. You must do both at the same time—steady your mind and meditate.

As you sit down to meditate, think of the cravings and desires of the mind as mere dreams. See them as unreal. They can never attach themselves to the mind. Feel that you are pure. Thus purity will gradually fill your mind.

As you continue in meditation you may experience a divine light, or you may hear the sound of Om. Many such spiritual experiences may come. But pay no attention to them. They are of little value except that they indicate you are on the right path.

If you wish to realize God, practise the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance. In due course you will be enlightened. When the time comes, the Lord will reveal His grace to you. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Unless the time is ripe the mother bird does not break open the egg." Don't be impatient. Impatience is of no avail. Work and wait. This waiting period is no doubt very wearisome. One moment you feel hope, then again despair; joy is followed by sorrow. Thus the struggle continues for days and days until God at long last is revealed.

XXIII

IMITATE THE LIVES OF THE HOLY

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how does devotion to God grow?

MAHARAJ

By keeping the company of the holy. Listen to their teachings and mould your life to the pattern of theirs. But without continence and the practice of meditation, you can't grasp the spirit of the enlightened ones; neither can you understand the scriptures. Read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and meditate on its teachings. The more you meditate on God the better will be your understanding of holy books. Knowledge of God from hearsay is one thing. To live in God is another. But the knowledge acquired through realization is entirely different from both.

If you have the slightest desire for name and fame or craving for fleshly enjoyments you cannot reach Him. Nag Mahasaya used to say, "It's like trying to row an anchored boat." He also used to say: "It's easy to get name and fame. But holy is he who can renounce them."

Blessed is he who can associate with an enlightened soul.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some believe that merely keeping company with the holy is enough. One need do no more.

MAHARAJ

No! Merely keeping their company isn't enough. Open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. Carefully observe their lives and imitate their example. It's a lazy man's attitude to think that he has nothing more to do than associate with the holy. Needless to say, the mere association is very important. In their company, doubts are removed and pure thoughts are awakened. No scriptures or books can create such pure impressions on a man's life or transform him as vitally as contact with the enlightened.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, Sri Ramakrishna has said that solitude is an aid to spiritual growth.

MAHARAJ

Yes, that's true; but you should retire into solitude only when you've attained some growth in the spiritual life. To retire from human society before one is ready is unwise. In this world of time, space and causation it's impossible to find true solitude. It lies beyond the mind and intellect. It is identical with the Most Tranquil.

It is better for a beginner to live in the company of holy men.

DISCIPLE

The other day you said that impatience was of no avail, that we should be content to work and wait. Does that mean that we must not yearn to realize God immediately?

MAHARAJ

I must have said that in another connection. Yes, you must yearn to realize Him, but don't be carried away by temporary emotions, or give expression to them.

To intensify spiritual emotions, you must hold them within. If you give vent to them, they will exhaust themselves. Then dryness may follow.

The man of true devotion yearns for Lord without becoming impatient. Even if he sees no light he will not give up his devotions. Only those who love God like shopkeepers looking for profit will give up if their prayers are not answered immediately.

XXIV

PEACE DWELLS IN THE MAN WHO LOVES GOD

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how can we develop yearning for God?

MAHARAJ

When your mind becomes purified by the influence of holy men and when you practise spiritual disciplines, yearning will grow.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, how does one attain peace?

MAHARAJ

Peace dwells in the man who loves God. Realize that your life is barren without Him. Yearn for Him, and peace will follow. When a man finds no peace in the world, dispassion grows within him and he is drawn to God.

The more a man finds that the world is barren, the more intense becomes his devotion to God and the greater is his peace. The greater the thirst, the sweeter is the water. Create thirst and you will have peace in God.

DISCIPLE

How can love grow?

MAHARAJ

By prayer, meditation, and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

DISCIPLE

Can a man realize God while living in the world?

MAHARAJ

Is any one outside the world?

DISCIPLE

No, Maharaj, I mean, if a man lives the life of a householder.

MAHARAJ

Yes, he also can realize God but he must make a greater effort.

DISCIPLE

Should a man renounce the world if dispassion arises?

MAHARAJ

Yes, he must. If true dispassion is once awakened, it will spread like a forest fire. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Like a fish released from the net, a man of renunciation who is once released from the world never wants to be caught again."

DISCIPLE

Is it possible to realize God without a Guru?

MAHARAJ

It is not so easy without a Guru. The Guru is one who shows the path to God through a mantram (holy name). He gives the secret of spiritual practices. He watches over his disciple and protects him from going astray. A Guru must be a knower of Brahman.

DISCIPLE

How can one make the mind one-pointed?

MAHARAJ

By practice. Pray, worship, meditate regularly. Meditation for one or two hours a day is not sufficient. The longer you practise, the more your mind will become one-pointed towards God. Follow a routine with regularity.

The aspirant must begin his spiritual practice by mentally worshipping his Chosen Ideal—God with form. Then meditate on the shining form and gradually let this form melt into the Formless. God is with form, without form, and beyond.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is the meaning of the Vedantic saying: "Brahman is real, the universe is unreal?"

MAHARAJ

Its meaning is that the universe of appearance is unreal. In samadhi the universe disappears. If you ask a seer about his experiences he will say, "All is infinite bliss there! There is no 'I' nor 'you'—there is only Existence-Knowledge-Bliss absolute. The joy of that experience is unspeakable."

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is the proof of God's existence?

MAHARAJ

The seer says, "I have seen Him. You also can see Him." Practise spiritual disciplines. Watch and wait. You will be blessed with His vision.

DISCIPLE

Sometimes as I keep practising japam, the mind becomes blank. What causes that, Maharaj?

MAHARAJ

That is one of the obstacles on the way to spiritual growth. Meditation must be continued, together with the practice of japam. Meditation means a continuous flow of thought towards God. When meditation ripens, there comes absorption, and samadhi is experienced. The joy that is realized in samadhi remains forever.

XXV

HOW TO MEDITATE

DISCIPLE

How should I meditate?

MAHARAJ

Hold the mind fast to the Lotus Feet of your Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

In which centre shall I meditate upon Him—the centre in the brain or the centre in the heart?

MAHARAJ

Meditation can be practised in both centres. I would advise you at first, however, to meditate in the heart.

DISCIPLE

But how, Maharaj?

MAHARAJ

Meditate upon Him in the centre of the Lotus in your heart. (Maharaj then gave the disciple more detailed instruction concerning meditation.

These details can only be learned personally from a Guru.)

DISCIPLE

But, Maharaj, the heart is made of flesh and blood. How can one think of God there?

MAHARAJ

I don't mean the anatomical heart. Think of the spiritual centre situated near the heart. In the beginning, as you think of Him inside the body, you will think of your flesh and blood. But soon you will forget the body and there will only remain the Blissful Form of the Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

Shall I think of Him exactly as He is seen in pictures or images?

MAHARAJ

Let the picture or image be merely an aid in bringing to your mind the living, conscious, and shining Form of your Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is really meant by meditating on the meaning of the mantram?

MAHARAJ

What is the meaning of the mantram? It is the name of God. You have a name. If I call you, your form also comes to my mind. Call on the Lord in this same way. Repeat the mantram and at the same time meditate on the Image of the Chosen Ideal.

DISCIPLE

How does one perform japam, by repeating the mantram mentally or audibly?

MAHARAJ

When you are alone, you may repeat it audibly to yourself; otherwise repeat it mentally.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the last few days during my meditation, the mantram has appeared in shining letters before my closed eyes. Then the form of the Chosen Ideal disappeared.

MAHARAJ

You must not let the Chosen Ideal leave your mind—meditation and mantram must go together. However, your experience of the mantram shows that you are proceeding along the right path. That was an auspicious sign. Mantram is sound-Brahman.

DISCIPLE

How should I begin to meditate on the Chosen Ideal?

MAHARAJ

First make your salutations at His Feet, and then proceed. As I have already said, perform japam at the same time. The mantram is charged with spiritual power. The truth of this will be directly revealed to you as you practise.

DISCIPLE

How can one get the mind absorbed in God, Maharaj?

MAHARAJ

Practise meditation regularly. Early morning is a good time for meditation. Read devotional scriptures before your meditation. This helps to concentrate the mind on God. After meditation sit quietly for at least half an hour; for during meditation itself the desired effect may not be produced. It may come later. The mind often grows calm while you are relaxing after meditation and spiritual experiences come. That is why an aspirant must not occupy himself with worldly thoughts or engage in secular affairs immediately after meditation. It may do him great harm.

Practise, practise! Even though you may not like it, keep up the regularity of your practice. Even mechanical practice is a great help. Devote at least two hours every day to the performance of japam. Sometimes it is beneficial just to sit quietly in a solitary place where the scenery is beautiful.

DISCIPLE

What should I do if while meditating on the Form of the Chosen Ideal, other forms of gods and goddesses appear before me?

MAHARAJ

Recognize this as an auspicious sign. Know that your Chosen Ideal is appearing to you in various aspects. He is one and He is many. Meditate on your Chosen Ideal, and if He appears before you in another form, enjoy that divine vision. Gradually you will find that all aspects are dissolved into the Chosen Ideal.

There are auspicious days favourable for spiritual practice—new-moon, full moon, the eighth day after the new or full moon and days on which special celebrations are held. On these days devote more time to japam and meditation.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, the scriptures declare that the Guru must be worshipped before meditation on God. How shall I worship the Guru ?

MAHARAJ

First meditate on him in the heart, realizing that Guru and God are one and the same. Then let the form of the Guru dissolve into the Chosen Ideal, and proceed with japam and meditation.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, you always insist that I must serve my father. Isn't it better to become a monk and serve you ?

MAHARAJ

Indeed it is. But does the mere wearing of the gerrua cloth make you a monk ? You have a duty to perform in serving your sick father. I am asking you to do this, my child, and at the same time to continue your regular spiritual practices. Serving your father will help you in your spiritual growth.

XXVI

WORK AND WORSHIP

MAHARAJ

While Swami Turiyananda and I were living on Mt. Abu, we received a letter from Swamiji just before his departure for America. He wrote, "To devote your life to the good of all and to the happiness of all is religion. Whatever you do for your own sake is not religion." How wonderful this truth is! His words are embedded in my heart.

It has come to my notice that some of you believe that the part you take in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission is a hindrance to your meditation and spiritual progress, and that Swami Premananda and I do not approve of such activities. This belief has no foundation. You don't understand our spirit. I will declare again and again and I emphasize this truth—that, however busy you may be in carrying out your duties, you must practise regular japam and meditation. Remember the Lord always—before you begin to work, while you are working, and after you have finished.

We have heard Swamiji often say, "Work and worship." Can anybody in the primary stage, live absorbed day and night in meditation? So you must work but without attachment and for the good of mankind. If you do not work, evil thoughts and unnecessary worries will occupy your mind.

The Gita and other scriptures emphasize the ideal of worship and meditation in the midst of the activities of life. I can confirm this from my own experience. "Work and worship" is the surest way to spiritual progress.

You see this diastrous war which is now going on.[1] Out of futile patriotism, men give up their wives and children and all their pleasures, and sacrifice their lives for a worldly cause. Yet you, who have given up hearth and home, renounced all sense-pleasures and surrendered yourselves at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, for the sake of a noble ideal—the good of mankind and the realization of God—you want to avoid a little work! Swamiji used to say to us, "If you think you are wasting your life in doing good to others, let it be wasted. You have wasted many lives before in vain things. Why not waste one life for the good of mankind?"

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[1] Refers to World War I.

But I am telling you that your life will not be wasted. You will realize God through work.

In performing japam and meditation, sufficient time and favourable conditions are important, certainly. But those who are inclined to practise spiritual exercises will do so under all circumstances. Those who complain of lack of time or suitable place never make any progress in this life. Cultivate the habit of constantly remembering God whether you are idle or engaged in work.

This constant flow of thought is meditation. Time and place and circumstances need not be taken into account in the practice of remembering God. Plunge in! Oh, the joy of it! If you once taste that joy, everything else will lose its savour for you.

Why are you afraid of work? Work for Him. But do so with a steady mind. Whether it is a great undertaking or a humble one it must be done with the utmost care and attention. Those who are steady in secular work are also steady in their spiritual exercises. To work in the proper manner you must have a profound regard for your work and at the same time be indifferent to the fruits of work. You can overcome all disinclination for work if you consider it as dedicated to God.

It is when you forget this secret that you become disturbed in mind. With a disturbed mind, you won't succeed either in your spiritual life or in secular work.

Certainly, it is easier to do a noble deed for the sake of name and fame. By such deeds, you cannot measure a man's real value.

To know the real man, you have to examine his daily actions; for it is his everyday actions which reveal his true character. A true Karma-yogin (selfless worker) will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking, even though it is of a most inferior kind. He is never motivated by the least desire for popular applause.

If you work and forget God, egotism and pride will overpower you. Therefore I tell you: never forget God, no matter whether you are working or sitting idle. To maintain this attitude, you must keep up your spiritual practices as well, no matter whatever happens.

XXVII

KEEP YOURSELF PURE

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I have tried in various ways to control my senses but I haven't succeeded. How can I do so?

MAHARAJ

"I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger and greed." If that is your way of approach, you can never conquer them; but if you can fix your mind on God, the passions will leave you of themselves. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The more you move eastward, the further you are from the west." Call on God, and pray to Him. Then the sense-objects will no longer attract you.

Your way of practising japam and meditation is very superficial.

If you practise casually, devoting only one or two hours a day to meditation, God cannot be found. Lose yourself day and night in His contemplation, in singing His praises and glory;

only then will you be blessed with His vision. Dive deep, my children, dive deep. Don't waste your time.

In the primary stage, the aspirant should increase his hours of meditation slowly but steadily. If, because of a momentary enthusiasm, he suddenly tries to increase his hours of meditation, he will find the reaction difficult to bear. Depression will be the result. He will then lose the power to meditate. It is a difficult task to lift a depressed mind and turn it back to spiritual practices.

God's grace is paramount. Without it nothing is achieved. Pray to Him unceasingly for His grace. Prayer is efficacious. He lovingly hears your prayers.

Hold on for a little while. Don't give your mind up to objects of desire. You must exercise great self-control in everything. Objects of desire! They will follow you like your slaves. Then, through His grace, you'll find you have no desire for them—nor will you feel any attachment to them.

You have embraced the monastic life, renouncing everything. It is not worthy of you to try to exercise authority over others. That brings great bondage. Whatever you do, know that it is the Lord's work you are doing. Look upon everything and everybody as belonging to Sri Ramakrishna. "Being deluded by egotism, man thinks himself the doer."

To tell a lie is the greatest sin. Even a drunkard or a man who frequents houses of ill-fame might be trusted, but never a liar! It is the blackest of sins.

Never find fault or criticise others. Such a habit is harmful to yourself. By thinking continually of the evil in others, the evil will impress itself upon your mind and the good that is in you will be overshadowed.

Play with God, sing His Glory, enjoy the fun! Why should you criticise others? Associate with everybody freely. Be happy with them. Don't indulge in gossip. Only a wicked-hearted man busies himself in finding fault with others.

Keep yourself pure and go forward, following your own ideal.

Learn to see the good in others. If a man has some goodness exaggerate his goodness in your mind. Give honour to all, praise all.

Do this and sympathy for others will grow. He who honours all beings finds honour for himself.

Never run down a fellow-man or slight him. Everyone sees the fault in others. Give him your love, make him your own and help him overcome his weaknesses. A man is composed of both good and evil. It is easy to see the evil in others but a holy man is he who can overlook their evil qualities and help them to become pure and holy.

Remember, my children, you are holy men. You must always be calm, gentle, modest and kindly of speech. Goodness and purity must flow out through every word you utter, every action you perform, through all your behaviour and movements.

I bless you, my children, that whosoever associates with you will find peace of heart. The sleeping God will awaken within them.

What is chastity? Be truthful always. Be self-controlled. Watch your speech. Envy no one. Hate no one. Be jealous of no one. If one practises chastity for twelve years, he attains the highest. You must practise continence.

Occasionally it is wise to go to places of pilgrimage and live there for some time. The holy atmosphere and change of scenery are aids to the health of the body and mind. These places are also conducive to meditation.

The heart must be purified. This world is full of pitfalls. Struggle must be your motto if you want to grow spiritually. Keep watch over every small desire which arises and control it. Strengthen the will and everything else will be simple.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some days when I sit down to meditate my mind naturally becomes tranquil. Again on other days it becomes so restless that I cannot calm it, however much I try.

MAHARAJ

That is the play of the gunas. The mind is subject to all three gunas. Through practice, when the sattva becomes established, the mind will always remain tranquil. You see, there is an ebb and flow in the tide of the Ganges. In the same way there are ups and downs in everything. Meditation also has its ebb and flow. This is only in the primary stage, however. Don't worry about it. Stick to your practices. When you have practised regularly for some time there will no longer be any ebb and flow in the mind. There will be a smooth unobstructed current flowing toward God.

Whenever you feel that there is a predominance of sattva and the mind is naturally tranquil, leave aside all work and engage in the practice of japam and meditation.

Each place of pilgrimage has a special time at which the spiritual current flows. If at those times, an aspirant meditates, his mind becomes easily absorbed and he finds increased joy in his meditation.

DISCIPLE

But Maharaj, how does one know that time?

MAHARAJ

It isn't difficult. A man who practises meditation can very easily recognize it. Benares! It seems to be apart from the world. It is a place of mighty spiritual consciousness. If a man lives there and practises spiritual disciplines, he quickly gets results. The mantram, the seed-word, unfolds here with little effort on the part of the aspirant. Here, Viswanath, (the Lord of the Universe), gives liberation to everyone, whether he be saint or sinner, rich or poor, great or insignificant.

XXVIII

DEVOTE YOURSELF TO GOD

Maharaj gave a few preliminary instructions to a new disciple and then continued.

MAHARAJ

Begin today, this very evening. Once in the morning and once in the evening practise japam and meditation. Practise for at least two years. You will find great joy; spiritual emotions will arise; a new vision will open up. I will tell you later what else to do.

Buy yourself a seat and keep it only for use during meditation. You are sure to find some result in two years. Some may even succeed in a year. Stick to it! After a while you will find such joy that you will have no inclination to leave your meditation. Sit straight, keep the right hand over the left, with the palms up. Hold your hands near the centre of your body in the region of the heart.

Read sacred scriptures. When you sit down to meditate, don't begin the practice at once. First, for a few minutes, banish all alien thoughts and make the mind blank. Then start your meditation. For the first two years, the struggle is greater; afterwards it becomes easier.

If there comes a day when you have a lot of work to do, you may meditate only once, or you may finish in ten or fifteen minutes. If the pressure of work is very great, fix your mind on God for a moment, then bow down to Him and close your meditation. You can do this in exceptional cases, but not always.

Before meditation wash your hands and face. Observe the two following rules of moral conduct: speak the truth and look upon all women as incarnations of Divine Mother. If you do these two things, you will find all other moral rules easy to follow.

Devote yourself to God. God *is*. Do not doubt His existence. I am telling you, my child, God *is*. Know for certain that He *is*.

XXIX

HOW TO REMOVE THE OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, some meditate in the shrine of the heart, others meditate on the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain. But I like to meditate externally. I try to see my Chosen Ideal just as I am looking at you. Which is the proper way?

MAHARAJ

Meditation differs according to the individual temperament of the aspirant. As a general rule, the best way is to meditate in the shrine of the heart. Consider the body as the temple and the Lord installed therein. However, when the mind becomes steady through meditation, then an aspirant can think of Him anywhere. He can then meditate on the Lord at his side or behind him or in his heart or anywhere else. When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining light is first experienced in the mystic vision. Together with this vision, a kind of higher and nobler joy is felt and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move onward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal. The mind is then merged in His consciousness.

Sometimes again the aspirant may hear in his mystic experience the long-drawn-out, sacred word Om, and the mind becomes absorbed in it. There is no end to mystic visions and experiences. The more you advance, the more you realize that this realm of spiritual experiences is unbounded, infinite.

There are some who think that they have attained God if they see the radiant light. Do not be deluded in this way. You must attain nirvikalpa samadhi, where all consciousness of duality is obliterated. Some say that that state is the end of spiritual experience, but I believe it is the beginning.

DISCIPLE

It generally happens that the mind, after making some progress, cannot advance further. Why is this so?

MAHARAJ

That is the weakness of the mind. The mind is limited by its capacity. All do not have the same mental power but it can be developed. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the power of the mind becomes strengthened by the practice of continence. Such a mind is not overcome by lust and anger. Passions seem trivial to it.

In the path of spiritual progress many obstacles may arise. Bad influences may hinder your growth. Hence the Mudra (position of fingers) and Bhuta Shuddhi (the purification of the elementals) and similar practices are prescribed in the ritualistic worship.

DISCIPLE

You call each one of us to you and inquire about our spiritual progress and our difficulties. You always give us new courage and enthusiasm, Maharaj.

MAHARAJ

But you see, I am not in the same mood always. Sometimes I feel like entreating and imploring you to go on with your spiritual practices. Again, at other times, I see that the Lord is everything, the Lord is the cause, the Lord is the doer, the Lord is the instrument and the Lord is the deed. He is all and everything. I see the Lord playing in so many forms. Then who am I to instruct whom? Why should people accept my words? But do you know, my child, when the inspiration comes from the Lord, they do accept them and follow them.

DISCIPLE

Is grace conditional?

MAHARAJ

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the breeze of grace is always blowing; you have only to unfurl your sails. He would also say: "One needs a fan when it is hot but the moment a cool breeze sets in, you stop fanning.

DISCIPLE

How does one know whether a man is having true mystic experiences or hallucinations?

MAHARAJ

The true spiritual vision brings a lasting bliss, and the mind is aware of the truth of the vision.

DISCIPLE

What is the real function of Mudra and other rituals in formal worship?

They are great aids in the primary stage of spiritual life. They help to remove many bad external influences which hinder an aspirant's progress. You will notice sometimes that as you go to meditate your mind is tranquil. Within a few minutes, however, the mind is made restless by evil thoughts. I had to suffer at one time from such influences. Sri Ramakrishna watched me from a distance and knew my condition. He approached me and said, "I see that something is disturbing you." He wrote something on my tongue and uttered some words inaudibly. I was immediately free from the disturbing state. If, however, the aspirant has advanced, these influences cannot touch him.

XXX

WHAT IS AUSTERITY?

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, what is austerity?

MAHARAJ

Austerities are of many types. Once I saw a man who took a vow not to sit or lie down for twelve years. When I met him, he had nearly finished his period. Only five or six months remained. Standing continuously for so many years had made his legs grow fat as they do in elephantiasis. While sleeping he held himself up by a rope.

Some practise the austerity of standing all night in neck-deep water in the winter and at the same time making japam. Again there is the austerity of sitting in the blazing summer sun in the centre of four fires.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, is that what austerity means?

MAHARAJ

Heavens, no!

DISCIPLE

Then what is real austerity?

MAHARAJ

Those are not real austerities. Any one can perform them. The body is easily controlled. But it is another matter to control the mind. It is very difficult to renounce lust and gold, to give up the desire for name and fame.

Real austerity is based upon these three principles: first, you must take refuge in the Truth. Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold, while performing any action. Second, you must conquer lust. Third, renounce all cravings. Observe these three principles. That's real austerity. To conquer lust is the most important of them all. It has been declared in our scriptures that he who practises continence for twelve years can easily attain God. This is the most difficult task. I can tell you from my own experience that it isn't possible to meditate properly unless you keep continent. The craving of lust is very subtle, and extremely difficult to control. That's why a spiritual aspirant must always be careful in associating with the opposite sex. Through continence a special power is stored up in the brain. If a man becomes established in continence, he will begin to see the expression of God everywhere.

But remember, it is not possible to practise continence without devoting yourself to the performance of japam.

XXXI

KNOW GOD FIRST

MAHARAJ

Many nowadays feel that they should devote their lives to the service of their country and mankind. I believe this idea has taken hold of the minds of our people because of the influence of modern education. It is impossible to do any good to others unless a man has already built up his own character. Those who have taken refuge in God and have received His grace can never make a false step. Their very lives do good to mankind. Every action, every word, the very way they behave becomes a source of good to all. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First hold the pillar!" That is, first realize God, Who is the goal of human life. Know him first. Have intense faith in Him, then go and serve others. When a man realizes Him, and becomes His instrument, he finds peace in himself and gives peace to others.

My Master used to say, "God is manifest in the heart of His devotees, His children." Therefore we must be pure in heart; His home is in the heart of the pure. He stays far away from an impure heart. When our hearts become pure and transparent as glass, when all impressions of the past have been wiped out, then only will He seat Himself in our hearts, then only will He become manifest there.

The pure mind receives a clear reflection of God. If the mirror is covered with dirt it does not reflect. This reflection does not fall upon an unclean mind. You are all young now. Your minds are free from this dirt. Keep the shrine ready for Him within your heart. Take care that nothing else finds room there. Be pure and tranquil. Realize Him in this very life.

Do not waste your time in reading, other than the sacred books. Those books which do not evoke love and faith in God are useless. They only make a man vain of his learning. My child, if you wish to make your human life blessed, if you desire your own good. then dive deep into meditation with His name. Do not float on the surface but repeat the name of the Lord and dive deep.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in this age to teach that dispassion is the ideal of human life. Man runs after objects of enjoyment and degrades himself to the level of a brute. If you want to make human life worth living, then take refuge in God. Give up false happiness, seek and inherit eternal happiness.

Renounce. Give up this world. Give up everything for Him. Make Him your own. "You are our Father, You are our Mother, You are our Friend, You are everything."

When we give up worldly enjoyments and pass our days thinking of Him and contemplating Him, then only shall we make our human lives blessed and inherit true happiness.

Three conditions are essential for the realization of God: human birth, longing for liberation and the discipleship of an enlightened man. Through the grace of God you have been blessed with all the three. Make the best use of them and build your life in such a way that it is not spent in vain. Don't seek temporary pleasures; find eternal happiness. Remember this one thing, that in another human birth you may have the longing for liberation but you will not find the society of such enlightened souls as you now enjoy. It is a rare privilege, and only to be had as a result of great merit accumulated through many births. Through rare good fortune you have come within the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna. See that you do not waste your life in vain activities.

Faith! Have intense faith in the words of the Guru and you will achieve everything. Without faith in the words of the Guru, spiritual life is fruitless. Give yourself up to him as a kitten does to its mother. Then he will look after you, help you and guide you.

How far can your intellect go? Take refuge in the Guru. He, with his greater enlightenment, and sense of responsibility understands more than you and will protect you from all pitfalls. No harm can befall a disciple who is under the protecting wings of a Guru. Man may make many mistakes in life, until he finds God. But if he takes refuge in his Guru there is less chance of mistakes. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that if the father takes hold of the son's hand, there is no fear of the child's falling. Even if you make mistakes, the Guru, in whom you have taken refuge, will wipe out all your mistakes.

Without renunciation no peace can be had. Be dispassionate. Give up everthing for God's sake—in order to find goodness and attain peace. The heart is subject to its impulses but man must control it. If he has the will, he can be dispassionate and realize God.

Renunciation has nothing to do with the clothes you wear. It is not for show. He alone is a real monk who has given himself up completely to God, keeping nothing for himself. "This body, this mind, this understanding,—I offer everything to You. They are Yours. Make them Your instruments." Pray to Him unceasingly: "Lord, I do not know what is good or what is bad; I am Yours, do with me as You please." Pray! Pray unceasingly. Let Him be your only refuge.

Another thing I want you to remember: through the grace of the Lord you have come to understand that the goal of human life is to realize God. It doesn't matter if people praise or blame you, if they honour or insult you, if you find any place in the world or not, if your body stands or falls,—never move an inch from your principles or from your ideals. Say to yourself, "I must realize God in this life at all costs." If you can mould your life in this way, then I shall know that you are a worthy child of Sri Ramakrishna. Then I shall know that you have made your life blessed by coming in contact with holy men.

One other point I wish to make clear in this connection. Who is the real Guru? He must be an enlightened man. If a man doesn't know the path himself, how can he possibly show it to others? Mantrams, of course, are always potent; but when they are received from so-called Gurus who trade in religion and are themselves blind, they do not bring real peace or illumination. You have come to the children of Sri Ramakrishna; you are blessed indeed! He who is honest, faithful and devoted will have to come into the orbit of Sri Ramakrishna where alone in this age real peace is to be found. He who follows the ideal which Sri Ramakrishna embodies in this age, will become heir to eternal happiness. The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna know all the various paths which lead to God. Proceed along the path into which it has been your good fortune to be led, and pray to your Guru with a sincere heart. He will guide you, whether he is in the physical body or not. The true Guru lives in the invisible realm, after passing away from his body, and helps and guides his disciples until they also attain illumination.

Struggle! Struggle, my boy. Shake off all doubts. Plunge into your spiritual practices as taught by your Guru. Never make a show of your spirituality but always practise in secret. Sri Ramakrishna used to say. "When you meditate, retire into a solitary corner, or a forest, and meditate within the secret chamber of your heart." Make a little effort for a time, and you will discover what fun it is to live a contemplative life. You will be transformed. You have the protection of an enlightened soul. There is nothing to worry about. You are sure to succeed.

XXXII

STRIVE AND YOUR EYES WILL OPEN TO HIS GRACE

DISCIPLE

How many hours should one who is living a purely contemplative life pass in study, worship and meditation?

MAHARAJ

Devote as much time as possible. Those who lead purely meditative life should spend at least sixteen hours every day in japam and meditation. With practice you will be able to prolong this period. The more the mind is absorbed within, the greater will be the joy of meditation; and once you taste joy in your spiritual practices, the desire to continue them will grow. Then you won't have to ask how long to meditate. Your own mind will tell you.

Before you reach this stage you must see that you spend two-thirds of your day in the practice of japam and meditation. Spend the rest of the time in the study of sacred books and in self-analysis. The more intensely you analyze yourself the more you will understand the condition of your own mind, and you will be able to eliminate the subtler cravings. When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated, subtle desires, and the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation. The practice of japam and meditation brings the aspirant to this stage. The spiritual disciplines are practised to make the mind pure and tranquil. If you practise japam and meditation and the mind still does not become tranquil or you do not taste joy in God, then you may know you are not practising rightly.

DISCIPLE

Sometimes the mind does not like to practise meditation. What should I do then? Should I occupy myself in the study of sacred books, or should I force myself to meditate?

MAHARAJ

The mind rebels against struggling. It always seeks ease and comfort. But if you wish to attain anything you must force it to struggle. That is the only way to make your mind steady. If you find it difficult to sit for long hours, lie down on your bed and practise japam. If you feel sleepy, walk and make japam. Only thus can you steady your mind and make meditation your second nature. Should you give up meditation because the mind does not like it? If you go on in that way you can never learn to meditate. Regular war must be waged against the mind. To force the mind to obey you is the ideal of spiritual discipline.

DISCIPLE

Should one observe the vow of silence during this period of intense contemplation ?

MAHARAJ

Both forced silence and wild indulgence in talk are equally harmful. What's the use of simply checking your speech ? Check the wanderings of the mind : that's what matters. Avoid unneccesary talk and keep your mind on Him who is Silence. That's the real meaning of the vow of silence. Forcibly restraining your speech brings evil effects.

DISCIPLE

Maharaj, I cannot do anything by myself. Bless me, that I may have faith in you and in the Lord.

Bless me, that I may understand your grace and have it always.

MAHARAJ

Never lose faith in yourself. The Lord will do everything for you. Have faith in Him. Repeat His name. He will reveal the truth to you. Don't be restless. Have patience, and go on struggling. Struggle and you will surely reach Reality. Don't waste your precious time in unnecessary thoughts or metaphysical speculations. Pray to the Lord that cravings may never arise in you. Lord's grace shines upon all. Strive a little and your eyes will open to His grace.

APPENDIX

JAPAM

When a disciple is initiated by his Guru, the Guru gives him a special mantram for his own use in prayer and meditation. A mantram is a Holy Name of God. The practice of repeating one's mantram is called japam.

The Hindu devotee recognizes that all the names of God have an equal power. Calling God by many names may seem to divide Him, but God is present in each. Through each name, His power can reach His devotees.

"Truth is one, sages call It by various names." The One Infinite Being, Who is Infinite Wisdom, Infinite Love, can never be divided. He is One without a second. Yet He has many aspects and many modes of expression. Each of these aspects symbolizes the Infinite God. Each aspect has its own sound-symbol, its name. These sound-symbols have been evolved out of the deepest spiritual perceptions of the seers and sages. The

Hindus believe that when such a sound-symbol, a mantram, is received from a Guru, it is charged with the living power of God. The latent divinity which is within each human soul becomes awakened by repetition of the mantram and meditation on the aspect of Godhead which it represents. The aspect of Godhead which is worshipped by an aspirant is called his " Chosen Ideal ".

To quote Swami Vivekananda: " Every sect of every religion presents only one ideal of its own to mankind, but the eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress into the inner shrine of Divinity, and places before humanity an almost inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each of them a manifestation of Eternal One. With the kindest solicitude, the Vedanta points out to aspiring men and women the numerous roads, hewn out of the solid rock of the realities of human life, by the glorious sons or human manifestations of God, in the past and in the present, and stands with outstretched arms to welcome all—to welcome even those that are yet to be—to that Home of Truth and that Ocean of Bliss, wherein the human soul, liberated from the net of maya, may transport itself with perfect freedom and with eternal joy."

This does not mean, however, that an aspirant can worship God in one aspect today and another aspect tomorrow. It is imperative that he should hold to his Chosen Ideal. The young plant must be hedged round and protected until it has grown into a tree. The plant of spirituality will die, if it is exposed too early to change of ideas and ideals. Devotion to one Ideal is absolutely necessary for the beginner, in his practice of religious discipline. While meditating on the Chosen Ideal, one must repeat the mantram.

Japam may appear monotonous and mechanical when not accompanied by meditation. Nevertheless, it has a good effect. If one persists, the monotony will break, and the presence of God will be felt. Through japam, an inner joy and sweetness will arise which will help the aspirant to devote himself more and more to the practice of the Presence of God.

In his teachings, Maharaj lays great stress on the value of japam. These teachings were given to initiated disciples, who had received mantrams from their Gurus. Those who have not yet received a mantram from a Guru may repeat the sacred word Om, or any Holy Name of God which appeals to them.

Purascharan is the vow to perform japam a certain number of times every day, methodically increasing and decreasing the number. For instance, the aspirant may begin on the first day after the new moon by repeating the mantram one thousand times. Next day, he repeats it two thousand times, next day three thousand; thus increasing the number every day until the day of the full moon, when he reaches fifteen thousand. Next day, the japam is reduced to fourteen thousand, and so on, coming down to one thousand at the next new moon. This practice may be continued over a period of one, two or three years, as the aspirant chooses or the Guru directs. In connection with the Purascharan, additional number of japam are sometimes substituted for other religious duties, such as almsgiving, or the performance of sacrificial rites. In order to facilitate counting the required number of japam, the Hindu devotee, like the Buddhist and the Catholic, often uses a rosary or string of beads.

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